







# JAN VERMEER OF DELFT









**JAN VERMEER OF DELFT**  
**A YOUNG WOMAN WITH A WATER JUG, OR**  
**A YOUNG WOMAN OPENING A CASEMENT**  
**METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK**



# JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

BY

PHILIP L. HALE

WITH REPRODUCTIONS OF ALL OF VERMEER'S  
KNOWN PAINTINGS AND EXAMPLES OF  
THE WORK OF CERTAIN OF HIS  
CONTEMPORARIES



BOSTON  
SMALL, MAYNARD AND COMPANY  
PUBLISHERS

**COPYRIGHT, 1913**  
**By SMALL, MAYNARD AND COMPANY**  
**(INCORPORATED)**

**THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, CAMBRIDGE, U.S.A.**

## PREFACE

THIS book is written to make the name and the work of Jan Vermeer of Delft better known to Americans. Although he is now well known to artists and connoisseurs he still remains quite unheeded by very many intelligent and cultivated people. It is to overcome, if possible, this neglect, to bring the man and his work home to people, and to tell so far as may be the curious story of this artist's disappearance and of his later reappearance that the following pages are written.

Since there is but little to tell of Vermeer's life a good deal of this book is given to a study of his artistic qualities and so far as may be of his technical processes.

His particular qualities—his design, his study of edges, his intuition for colour values, his peculiar and very personal system of colour arrangement—are very characteristic and have not perhaps been overmuch dwelt on by previous writers.

Anyone who writes of the life and times of Vermeer is of necessity under great obligation to



half a dozen or more men whose researches have cleared up much of the mystery concerning him.

The investigations of Bürger-Thoré, of Harvard and of Obreen; and the later discoveries and corrections of Dr. Bredius, Dr. Martin and Dr. Hofstede de Groot are of the greatest importance. Due acknowledgment is hereby made to all of these gentlemen for the assistance which they, quite unconsciously, have afforded the writer of this book. Grateful acknowledgment is also made for the kind assistance and advice given for certain details by Dr. W. R. Valentiner and by Dr. Philip Gentner.

P. L. H.

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I THE ART OF JAN VERMEER . . . . .	3
II HOLLAND IN VERMEER'S DAY . . . . .	35
III VERMEER AND HIS TIMES. . . . .	53
IV CHARACTERISTICS OF VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE	99
V VALUES IN VERMEER'S PAINTING . . . .	143
VI COMPOSITION AND DESIGN . . . . .	161
VII OLD MASTERS . . . . .	193
VIII VERMEER AND MODERN PAINTING . . .	215
IX VERMEER'S PICTURES . . . . .	237
 BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	 377
INDEX . . . . .	385



## ILLUSTRATIONS

<p>A YOUNG WOMAN WITH A WATER JUG, OR A YOUNG WOMAN OPENING A CASEMENT. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York</p>	<p><i>Frontispiece</i></p>
<p>A LADY READING A LETTER, AND A MAID-SERVANT. <i>Gabriel Metz. (Attributed by Lord Ronald Gower to Jan Vermeer of Delft)</i> . . . . .</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Collection of the late Alfred Beit, London</p>	<p><i>Facing page</i> 8</p>
<p>THE SOLDIER AND THE LAUGHING GIRL. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Collection of Henry C. Frick, New York</p>	<p>16</p>
<p>THE LACE MAKER. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Museum of the Louvre, Paris</p>	<p>24</p>
<p>WOMAN WEIGHING PEARLS OR GOLD. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Collection of P. A. B. Widener, Philadelphia</p>	<p>30</p>
<p>DUTCH ROOM. <i>Artist unknown. (Wrongly attributed to Jan Vermeer of Delft; possibly by Pieter de Hooch)</i> . .</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin</p>	<p>40</p>
<p>A STREET IN DELFT. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Collection of J. Six, Amsterdam</p>	<p>54</p>
<p>A VIEW OF DELFT FROM THE ROTTERDAM CANAL. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Royal Picture Gallery, The Hague</p>	<p>58</p>
<p>THE LESSON. <i>Artist unknown. (Formerly attributed to Jan Vermeer of Delft; probably by Michiel Sweerts)</i> .</p> <p style="text-align: center;">National Gallery, London</p>	<p>66</p>
<p>THE GOLDFINCH. <i>Karel Fabritius</i> . . . . .</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Royal Picture Gallery, The Hague</p>	<p>72</p>

	<i>Facing page</i>
<b>PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN.</b> <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	82
Museum of Fine Arts, Buda-Pesth	
<b>INTERIOR, WITH WOMAN AND BOY.</b> <i>Pieter de Hooch</i> . . . . .	88
Wallace Collection, London	
<b>PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG MAN.</b> <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft.</i> ( <i>Authenticity not established</i> ) . . . . .	92
Museum of Brussels	
<b>THE PROCURESS, OR THE COURTESAN.</b> <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	100
The Picture Gallery, Dresden	
<b>CHRIST IN THE HOUSE OF MARY AND MARTHA.</b> <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	112
Collection of W. A. Coats, Skelmorlie Castle, Scotland	
<b>LADY WITH A LUTE.</b> <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	124
Collection of Mrs. Henry E. Huntingdon, New York	
<b>DIANA AT HER TOILET.</b> <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft.</i> ( <i>Authenticity not fully established</i> ) . . . . .	132
Royal Picture Gallery, The Hague	
<b>THE GIRL WITH THE WINE GLASS.</b> <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	136
Picture Gallery, Brunswick	
<b>A GIRL AT THE SPINET.</b> <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	144
Collection of the late Alfred Beit, London	
<b>THE LOVE LETTER.</b> <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	156
Rijks Museum, Amsterdam	
<b>THE CONCERT.</b> <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	162
Collection of Mrs. John L. Gardner, Boston	
<b>THE SICK CHILD.</b> <i>Gabriel Metz</i> . . . . .	168
In the possession of F. Kleinberger, Paris	
<b>A GIRL ASLEEP.</b> <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	174
Collection of the late B. Altman	
<b>THE LOVE LETTER.</b> <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	182
Collection of the late Alfred Beit, London	
<b>A MAID-SERVANT POURING OUT MILK, OR THE MILK-WOMAN.</b> <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	188
Rijks Museum, Amsterdam	

# ILLUSTRATIONS

xi

*Facing page*

THE CONCERT. <i>Gerard Terburg</i> . . . . .	196
Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin	
ALLEGORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	204
Royal Picture Gallery, The Hague; lent by Dr. A. Bredius	
A LADY AND A MAID-SERVANT. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	210
Collection of James Simon, Berlin	
A YOUNG LADY WITH A PEARL NECKLACE. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	220
Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin	
THE SLEEPING SERVANT. <i>Artist unknown. (Formerly attributed to Jan Vermeer of Delft by Bürger-Thoré)</i> . . . . .	228
Collection of P. A. B. Widener, Philadelphia	
PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG GIRL. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	232
Arenberg Gallery, Brussels	
LADY WRITING. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	240
Collection of J. Pierpont Morgan; lent to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York	
A GENTLEMAN AND A YOUNG LADY; SOMETIMES CALLED THE MUSIC LESSON. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	252
Collection of Henry C. Frick, New York	
A YOUNG GIRL WITH A FLUTE. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	264
In the possession of M. Knoedler and Company, New York, London and Paris	
A LADY PLAYING THE GUITAR. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	268
Collection of John G. Johnson, Philadelphia	
A YOUNG LADY AT THE VIRGINALS. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	272
National Gallery, London	
LADY AT THE VIRGINALS AND A GENTLEMAN. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	278
Royal Collection, Windsor Castle	
A GIRL READING A LETTER. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	284
Rijks Museum, Amsterdam	
PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG GIRL. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	296
Royal Picture Gallery, The Hague	

	<i>Facing page</i>
A GIRL DRINKING WITH A GENTLEMAN. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	310
Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin	
STUDY OF A HEAD. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft. (Authenticity contested)</i> . . . . .	316
Royal Print Collection, Berlin	
A GIRL READING A LETTER. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . .	324
Picture Gallery, Dresden	
THE ASTRONOMER. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	328
Städel'sches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt-on-Main	
THE ASTRONOMER. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft. (Authenticity contested)</i> . . . . .	334
Collection of the Vicomte du Bus de Gisignies, Brussels	
ARTIST AT WORK, OR THE STUDIO. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> .	344
Collection of Count Czernin von Chudenitz, Vienna	
A YOUNG LADY SEATED AT THE SPINET. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	354
National Gallery, London	
FAMILY IN THE COURTYARD OF A HOUSE. <i>Pieter de Hooch</i> . . . . .	364
Academie der Bildenden Künste, Vienna	
THE ASTRONOMER. <i>Jan Vermeer of Delft</i> . . . . .	372
Collection of the late Baron Alphonse de Rothschild, Paris	

# THE ART OF JAN VERMEER





# JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

## CHAPTER I

### THE ART OF JAN VERMEER

WE find the best men by a process of elimination. At the outset it may seem strange to call Vermeer the greatest painter who has ever lived. Yet if one looks at painting from the realistic standpoint one of necessity arrives at something like this idea. One may readily conceive that Titian and Giorgione were more seductive artistic personalities; that Da Vinci was more subtle, Raphael a greater draughtsman. But when it comes to sheer downright painting it would seem that Vermeer was in most respects the leader of all. Indeed, it might almost be said that from our ultra-modern point of view, till Vermeer painted no one had tried to paint at all. Of course there were giants like Velasquez, Rubens and Rembrandt who did very wonderful things. But none of these conceived of arriving

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

at tone by an exquisitely just relation of colour values, and it is this idea that lies at the root of all really good modern painting.

It is true that Vermeer himself seems to have tried to come at a certain tonality by underpainting in blue. Still, compared to any other old master, his sense of colour values, the relations of various tints and hues one with another, seems to have been exquisitely acute. This and the manner in which he studied the "edges" of objects—a subject which is discussed in another chapter—are the two chief qualities which lead to his preëminence as a painter. They may not seem to the lay mind very important qualities. But it is not claimed that Vermeer is an important painter from the layman's point of view. Rather it is asserted that to other painters Vermeer seems very great, perhaps the greatest painter *per se* who has lived.

One thinks, of course, of Velasquez in this connection, and no one would deny that Velasquez was a painter of stupendous ability. But viewed from the modern standpoint, and that, it is obvious, is the only point on which we can stand, Velasquez had not so unerring a sense of values, or of colour relations, as had Vermeer. For in-

## THE ART OF JAN VERMEER

stance, in the *Forge of Vulcan* he makes the white-hot metal about the same value as the flesh, and makes no cross lights on the flesh from this incandescent mass. While his colour is gravely beautiful and in many ways truer than the work that had been done up to his time, it is not always absolutely just. In a head like the *Philip IV* in London, it is true, he arrives at astonishingly delicate colour relations in the face. But in other pictures he seems to have bound them together by a sort of black broth, which achieves, indeed, a kind of *ensemble*, but not the exquisite *ensemble* that obtains in nature. In short, Velasquez, a very great man, and one of the greatest of painters, was not particularly strong in just this respect.

One of the things which particularly interest us in Vermeer is his modernity. Certain pictures of his, notably the *Studio Interior* of Vienna, look, as the saying is, as if they had been painted yesterday. And it is not only that the colour looks freshly laid on, but that it has been seen and understood as we moderns see and understand colour.

A certain brilliant artist has very acutely pointed out, that nowadays we are apt to admire

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

contemporaries because their work suggests various old masters; but that, on the other hand, we admire most, as painters, those old masters whose work most resembles modern painting.

Certainly various qualities in Vermeer's work are singularly modern; his point of view, his design, his colour values, his edges, his way of using the square touch, his occasionally *pointillé* touch, — all these are peculiarly modern qualities which one seldom notices in other old masters. Perhaps then, we particularly admire Vermeer because he has attacked what seem to us distinctly modern problems or motifs and solved them, on the whole, in a modern way. And with this he has been able to retain something of the serenity, poise and finish that we regard as peculiarly the property of the old masters. Our modern work is petulant, that of the masters was serene.

It is true that Vermeer was not always wholly successful. Nobody ever has been, and doubtless no one ever will be. It is silly to ascribe to one's hero all the virtues; it is enough to point out the qualities which he possesses.

Vermeer's work is often pale, greyish — at times almost a monotone. These very defects are accounted virtues by some of his more passion-

## THE ART OF JAN VERMEER

ate admirers; but it seems probable that they all come from his habit of underpainting in blue and occasionally using yellow and pink lake glazes. In some instances the glazes have died out and the underpainting has come through, hence the famous grey tone. What makes one feel that this is so is that certain of his pictures have held true. The *Procuress*, made at the beginning of his career, and the *Studio*, apparently done toward the last, both look, in all probability, much as when they were first painted.

It cannot be denied that Vermeer's still-life is sometimes better than his heads and hands. It is hard to believe that anything could be better painted than are some of his map-rollers and the lions' heads on his chairs. On the other hand it is quite easy to understand that heads and hands might very well be better drawn and modelled than are some of his heads and hands. Still, taking him by and large, it would seem that Vermeer has more great painting qualities and fewer defects than has any other painter we know about.

It is when one compares him with other very great painters of his own sort that his superiority is most manifest. Compared to him Terburg ap-

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

pears sleazy and mannered; De Hooch looks hot and stodgy; even Metsu, perhaps the most accomplished technician of them all, seems rather artificial and by no means so alert to colour values. This is not to say that these men were not very great. Each one had extraordinary qualities. But Vermeer combines in himself most of these good qualities and avoids many of their defects.

One hears nowadays a good deal of talk about "the innocent eye." The phrase was perhaps invented by the impressionists, whose great effort was to render the thing just as it appeared. They, too, felt the effect which old ideas or knowledge had in vision. So they invented the phrase "innocent eye" to describe an eye unvitiated by previous impressions.

If one had always been blind and by some fortunate surgical operation were enabled to see, one would possess the innocent eye; that is, one would see things exactly as they appeared without any understanding of them or any prejudice about the matter. If it be a good thing to possess this sort of vision, then Vermeer was most happy. For he seems to have seen things in this manner. If he painted a hand, he would make

## THE ART OF JAN VERMEER

it by the appearance of light and shade, not by painting in the direction of the forms. Even where he indicated things by brushing in the planes in the direction of the forms he apparently modified this by working over the edges and carrying the light across the form.

What, then, is really the basic quality of Vermeer's art, the thing that makes it most itself and most different from the work of other men, is his manner of seeing. Where other men had a genius for drawing or for colour, he had a genius for vision. After studying his work most carefully, one arrives at a feeling that what gave his work its peculiar quality was that he looked at things harder than do other men. Other men's work comes wrong because they have not observed the thing before them carefully enough to understand its making. Often, too, they have acquired a manner of making things, a *parti-pris*, which impels them to distort nature to suit their book. Vermeer also had his manner of making things, but after he had laid the picture in, and indeed carried it quite far, he seems to have sat back and looked at nature again and again to see if there was anything he could do to his picture to make it more "like." Naturally, at that stage



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

of its making there always was something he could do, and he was always willing, at no matter what sacrifice of apparently skilful technique, to do everything he could to obtain absolutely the real aspect of nature — *la vraie vérité*, as Courbet liked to call it.

In studying Vermeer's works one gets to feel that while his technique is almost always adequate they do not succeed merely through technique or on account of it. Though he was a very skilful workman, one perceives that Metzsu was more skilful — and indeed it must be said that as a workman, in modern days the unfortunate Bague was more skilful than either of them. But one feels that Vermeer looked so hard at the thing before him, he studied it so carefully, he came to understand it so well, that strength was given him to render it. His almost perfect rendering is the result of perfect understanding. When one studies some of his more successful masterpieces, one almost feels that no one else has ever really looked at nature at all. One wonders what these other painters were doing. One perceives that they spent most of their time making their pictures, not enough time in looking at and appraising the scene before them; they seem to

## THE ART OF JAN VERMEER

have thought more of how they were doing it than of how it looked.

It is quite evident that Vermeer, too, thought a great deal of how he was doing it. It is impossible to imagine a great painter doing otherwise. Only, it would seem that Vermeer thought how he would best render the thing he saw, where other men thought how to make the thing they saw conform to their manner of rendering.

The difference in the matter of vision between the simple-minded layman and the artist is that the first, in looking at nature, tries to perceive what it may be, while the second tries to see how it looks. These may seem to be the same thing, but they are not quite the same. For instance, a layman in looking at a white column in shadow against a far-off greenish-blue mountain would say that the column was lighter than the mountain. He knows that the column is white, that the mountain is covered with dark trees; therefore it seems to him that the mountain must be the darker of the two. But the artist perceives that, in reality, the column appears darker than the mountain. Artists, then, are trained to paint things as they appear; but this is more difficult than it may seem. Artists, despite their training,

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

are constantly putting in things because they know they are there, or leaving things out because they have no particular understanding of them.

But Vermeer seems, more than other men, to have been able to see quite justly the thing as it appeared without prejudice or preconception, and, having rightly seen, to have been able to plan ways and means of justly rendering his vision.

One feels, first of all, in Vermeer's work that he was a truth-teller. It is rather fashionable nowadays to intimate that the truth, *la vraie vérité*, cannot be told in painting and therefore should be left severely alone. It is perfectly true that one cannot obtain absolute truth in paint any more than one can in words. But just as this does not absolve us from trying to tell the truth in words, so there is no particular reason why the painter should not at least try to obtain the truth in paint.

Vermeer's work does not indeed give the whole truth — it will be forever impossible that a canvas in two dimensions can give the whole truth about a world in three dimensions. But his work suggests the truth more completely than the work of anyone else one calls to mind at the present

## THE ART OF JAN VERMEER

moment. Vermeer, it would seem, tried purely to give the exact aspect of the thing opposite him. This perhaps is one of the reasons why his work is so sympathetic to many modern painters.

For Vermeer, almost alone among the old painters, faced resolutely many of the same problems that modern painters have set for themselves. He had at least a strong intuition for colour values. He showed in his *pointilliste* tones a sense of the intangible play of light. His tones, whether square-touch or *pointillé*, expressed the modern idea of "painting by the spot." What painting by the spot means is that if one painted a leopard one would first render the spots rather than the modelling.

Vermeer seems to have had the thought, uttered or unexpressed, that if he only could make his picture just like what was before him it would include all the valid technical merits of other painters. If one comes to think of it, when we admire a particular quality in a man's work, if it is at all worth admiring it is because it suggests some particular phase of nature.

We admire Da Vinci for his light and shade, Titian for his colour, Velasquez for his "tone," Ingres for his drawing. In so far as these qualities

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

are worth admiring in these men it is because they brought out the truth, *la vraie vérité* — the very closest, subtlest, most suggestive truth that that particular phase of nature had to show. It is not because they lie about it that we admire them, but because they tell the truth more acutely, with passion, with desire that we shall know its last refinement. Lovers are supposed to see in each other qualities that no one else can see, but we all know that it is really because they see more clearly, more deeply, with more sympathy than others, and detect qualities that are really there — not to be seen by the common herd. And so the artist-lover does not see wrong in searching for his appointed quality; he simply sees better than the others.

Then, if a man could render Nature absolutely as she appears, all these exquisite qualities would be added unto one. So Vermeer seemed to think, and although writers and critics have, time and again, warned us that this is not the right way to proceed — that one cannot have all the qualities — Vermeer seems to have gone a long way toward gaining them. The trouble with trying merely for light and shade, merely for colour, merely for drawing, is not only that we miss all

## THE ART OF JAN VERMEER

the other qualities, but even that which we try for we distort.

“From him who hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath.”

We have ghastly examples in Ribera and Monticelli. The one in trying for light and shade made his shadows too black; the other got pretty colour and lost all else; whereas a man who modestly tries to make the drawing, the values and the colour as they appear is apt if he has ability to do all three well. Each depends on the other. You cannot get really accurately modelled drawing without true colour. Indeed, if by some miracle one were able to paint each colour right in tone, shape and shift the drawing would come by itself. And so with light and shade and tone values or relations. They are simply other names for colour. Colour is simply another name for them. The truest drawing is a *mélange* of light and shade. The moment a man searches one quality for itself alone, he does, by that very act, strip it of some of its most important attributes. We too often forget that all things are made manifest to us through the action of light. “Light and shade” cannot truly be rendered unless it includes colour and form.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

Form, as it appears to us, cannot be rightly indicated without the aid of colour and of *chiaroscuro*. Colour, true colour, cannot be well suggested unless the shapes are right and the modulation; in other words, the drawing and values.

The reason Vermeer made his drawing so just, his values so true, was because he cared so much about colour. His drawing in his best things came right because the *chiaroscuro*, the edges and the colour were rightly observed. He loved light and shade, he was a master of it, and the only way he could render its beauty as he saw it was by getting his drawing and his subtle colour shifts just right.

Vermeer, then, told the truth not because it was wrong not to, but because he could not render the beautiful things he saw unless he painted true. A railroad company used to have a sign that employés should ring up fares and added, "Not to do it is wrong." And Dr. Holmes pretended they said, "'Tis naughty to do wrong."

Vermeer, then, did not strive to paint right because 'tis naughty to do wrong, but because the infinitely beautiful subtleties of light that he saw



*Jan Vermeer of Delft*

THE SOLDIER AND THE LAUGHING GIRL

COLLECTION OF HENRY C. FRICK, NEW YORK





## THE ART OF JAN VERMEER

about him could not really be rendered without true drawing and colour.

Refinement is a quality which marks almost everything that Vermeer made. Probably it was, so to say, a "by-product," a something which came of his effort for arrangement, for sense of light, and was not as a quality aimed at or tried for. None the less it is there. It marks almost every one of his works. And this is the more remarkable because it is a quality conspicuously lacking in most Dutch artists. Rembrandt, great as he was, seldom attained it. Indeed, he is an interesting instance of how great a man may be who almost wholly lacks that quality. With Steen, of course, it is nil. And the work of Metzsu is marred by the lack of this same sense of refinement. In Terburg's work it is there, but it is there an affected quality, *mièvre* and mincing and quite without the quiet gravity of Vermeer.

It is true that the *Procuress* — or the *Courtesan*, as it is sometimes called — is hardly what one would call very *raffiné*. But it was one of Vermeer's earlier works, he was evidently feeling his way, and it is characteristic of youth to be brutal lest it should be thought weak. Even the tech-

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

nique in this picture, although it has certain indubitable Vermeer qualities, is not so *raffiné* as that of much of his later work. And it is curious that the refinement of his technique, of his manner of composing, led inevitably to refinement of subject. There would be something almost grotesque about an indecent picture composed along grave, serious lines, although the Greeks achieved something like this in certain of their gems and vases. Conversely, if one loves quiet severe lines, cool quiet colours, one tends almost unconsciously to grave, almost severe subjects. The little figures in Vermeer's *Music Lesson* of Windsor Castle seem almost oppressed by a fate, which was to play their little part in a quiet and grave arrangement of four-square lines and sober colours.

This quality of refinement, indeed, is rather misunderstood by some of us. We speak of a picture as "refined" because its subject is refined — that is, not vulgar or indecent. Really it is the other way about — the subject is refined because the treatment is refined; that is, if an artist loves refinement in handling and composition, no other subject will suit his book. It is true that the technique of Degas is excessively refined, and that Watteau and Fragonard have hinted at delicate

## THE ART OF JAN VERMEER

indecencies in an accent of the most *raffiné*. Still these are *tours de force*. Besides, Degas' subjects are not vulgar or even indecent; they are simply poignant and harrowing; and pain, after all, is refining. With Watteau and with Fragonard the work is refined enough, to be sure, but there is the refinement of the lace pocket-handkerchief, not of the steel sword thrice refined.

For we often use the word "refined" when we mean anæmic or bloodless or *mièvre*. "Refined," one would guess, means purged of baser elements; and when we speak of a technique as being refined we should mean, not a technique affected, timid or frivolous, but a technique purged of all baser elements. And that is particularly its sense when applied to Vermeer's work. His composition, for instance, is based on the elimination of the unimportant; and his manner of painting is based on the revealing of things by light rather than on gloating over eccentric details. His line, which we have spoken of elsewhere, owes its distinguished quality to this selfsame purging of trivial elements.

And so it follows, naturally enough, that one very noticeable quality in Vermeer is his sense of selection. Apart from his technical skill, not a

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

little of the charm of his pictures comes from his coldly exquisite sense of the right thing for the right place. This sense does not appear strongly in his first work, the *Courtesan*, as we have seen. While it is good in composition, it certainly does not show any reticence in selection. The picture of *Martha and Mary*, again, while it has some fine points, does not err in being *ultra-raffiné*. In the *Milk-woman* he seems to have come to a realizing sense of the value of a simple motif. The composition is simpler in line than the earlier ones, yet it is not so exquisite as are his later compositions.

Art, that is pictorial art, has always been one of the signs of commercial prosperity, and usually the climax or apogee of a country's art has coincided with that country's decadence. One notes this in the history of Greek art and of the Italian Renaissance. A reason for it is not far to seek. When a country has been fighting for its freedom, usually the beginning of a country's greatness, many of the best men have been soldiers. Again, the money and interest of the country have turned, naturally enough, to war and not to the arts. Later, when the battle has been fought and

## THE ART OF JAN VERMEER

won, men have been willing to amuse themselves by the study and purchase of art.

Certainly this was true of Holland, though it is interesting to note that even during the fiercest struggles of the war, painters were serenely working at their craft, blithely painting pictures that had nothing to do with that war. Still it may be said, from our point of view, that the climax of Dutch art occurred after the fighting had ceased, and it occurred, too, when Holland had begun to take the downward steps that gradually led her to the position of a third-rate power.

Vermeer was born in 1632, twenty-four years after the Peace of Antwerp, and when he died, still a young man, in 1675, Holland had already ceased to be a great power. Yet, from our point of view, the art of Holland culminated in the work of Vermeer.

The country was immensely prosperous, even though the intense national spirit created by the War of Independence had begun to die out. It is in just such times as these that great art is created. And Vermeer, working in his peaceful town of Delft through the piping times of peace, was slowly creating it. From all that one can see the

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

drums and tramlings of Louis XIV's conquests did not disturb his quiet little studio.

Some have said that his later work shows traces of French influence, but this would be exceedingly hard to prove. It is true that Vermeer's later work was much smoother in surface and more elegant in *facture* than his earliest work, which was rather heavy and *empaté* or loaded. It is also true that this same change took place in the work of Nicholas Maes, as the direct result of French influence, but this can hardly be said to prove that Vermeer's change was also the direct result of French influence. As a matter of fact, all over Holland there was a distinct reaction against the heavy tortured surface of Rembrandt and of Rembrandt's pupils. Some of his pupils even, like Bols and Maes, joined in this reaction, which, though much decried by the *cognoscenti* of these and other days, was doubtless, on the whole, a sensible, healthy movement. Probably this movement was a good deal influenced by the French style. Le Roi Soleil had conquered in taste as well as in arms, and, moreover, the French style had, as it always had, the advantage of good sense and logic on its side, however much it may have been lacking in sentiment. So, in this way, it might be

## THE ART OF JAN VERMEER

said that Vermeer may have been indirectly affected by the French influence, though it is probable that in his case this influence chimed in with his own innate good sense about technique.

One hears a good deal nowadays about *naïveté* in art. But one must distinguish between different sorts of *naïveté*. There is, for instance, *naïveté* of intention, of execution, of vision. The cave-dweller who scratched a mammoth on a shoulder-bone was *naïf* in intention. He recorded his mental concept of the mammoth — not its appearance. A child's drawing is *naïf* in intention, and in execution as well. With Vermeer, the intention was full of artifice — the execution very *habile* — but the vision was absolutely *naïf*. He saw as a man cured of congenital blindness might see — absolutely without prejudice. His vision would have been photographic if it had not been so much truer than a photograph. He avoided the many errors of the photograph, but his eye had something of its absolute impersonality of vision. His choice of subject, his arrangement and his technique were immensely personal and *voulu*, but his vision was absolutely impersonal, unprejudiced, *naïf* and innocent.



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

An instance of this *naïveté* of vision may be given from the way in which he makes eyes, for of course the making was modified considerably by the vision. Now painters—even such realists as the Dutchmen—have made an eye by working in the sense of the form, as it were: lining in the upper lid, the lower lid, etc. With Vermeer the whole thing is made by the light and shade. An eye appears like an eye simply because the blottings of light and of shadow vouchsafed to have it come that way. This is particularly well illustrated in *The Lace-Maker* where the girl's left eye is indicated purely by the light and shade. When one looks at it by itself it seems almost startling. Yet so right is it that one never notices it at all till someone points it out. *The Lace-Maker* indeed throughout is an admirable example of *naïf* vision. Her right hand again, beautifully drawn for Vermeer, is made purely by the light and shade. Another good example of this sort of thing is the *Head of a Young Girl*, in the Hague Gallery.

It may then be said that Vermeer's vision was as impersonal as that of any painter who has ever lived. Things seemed to him as they appeared. It might seem that this would be so with all



*Jan Vermeer of Delft*

THE LACE-MAKER  
MUSEUM OF THE LOUVRE, PARIS



## THE ART OF JAN VERMEER

painters, but, curiously enough, it is not. Most painters intend to paint the thing seen as it appears; but while they often enough get the general effect, in some detail or other they paint not the appearance of the thing but rather their mental concept of the thing. This shows particularly in the way many painters do mouths or eyes or hands. They would paint a bit of still-life quite objectively and, humanly speaking, just as it appears; but when they attempt an eye or a mouth, they lose their *sang-froid* and begin lining it in for all the world like a primitive. If good acting is to hold the mirror up to nature, good painting, one would say, should hold it a hundred times longer. Yet constantly we find painters rendering a thing by a sort of receipt of handling rather than making it spot for spot as it appears in nature.

Chardin said, when asked how he painted, that he kept putting on touches till the thing looked finished; and, curiously enough, Monet has said almost the same thing. One feels that Vermeer must have worked in something like the same spirit. Although he was so skilful that he usually managed to conceal traces of his method, occasionally his square touch, or his *pointillé* touch, betrays it.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

In all the history of painting one finds two sorts of ways of making the thing: rendering "by the spot," and getting a "fused" rendering. El Greco was perhaps the first man to render "by the spot." And Velasquez followed him, although he was skilful enough to obtain the fused look as well. Other painters, of whom Rubens is a supreme example, have thought most of the fused, swept-together stroke which makes for apparently skilful execution. The trouble with their way is that, in making the stroke, in sweeping the edges together and thinking of the surface, one is a little apt to forget the exact aspect and colour value of the different masses or "spots."

The modern impressionists, on the other hand, are the most marked examples of painting by the spot; they sacrifice everything — handling, detail, surface — to getting the different patches of colour right, one in relation to the other. As is pointed out elsewhere, men who have painted in this manner get a sense of the relations of colour values that nothing else seems to give.

Vermeer seems more than most men to have united these two qualities of painting by the spot and yet keeping his surface good. His work seldom looks very fused, yet his surface is often very

## THE ART OF JAN VERMEER

smooth but not disagreeable. He seems to have tried to make his pictures finished and smooth as the men about him did; yet at any moment he stood ready to imperil the harmony of handling of his picture by working those curious little round spots of colour into his half light when he felt the fused look of things to be overmarked.

One wonders why it is that Vermeer, even after being rediscovered for fifty years, should still have missed recognition with the generality. It may be from a certain repellant quality which his work exerts in spite of its perfection — perhaps even on account of it. Some of the very greatest artists have had this quality — Da Vinci, one would say, and Velasquez. This is not to say that their work remains repellant — indeed, like caviare, olives, or may-wine it comes to exert a particular charm on account of its peculiarity. But one does say that the simple-minded person of average intelligence who purely loves Raphael and Del Sarto and Murillo, instinctively detests Da Vinci and Velasquez and Vermeer. In brooding over what may be the reason of this it occurs to one that it may spring from the impersonal quality of the men: their work is done in a cool, grave, seri-

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

ous way, without preoccupation with the minor airs and graces. They have not the captivating faults of Watteau or the engaging defects of Gainsborough. They are simply coldly and definitely right, and they gain something of the hatred which those who are right must always endure.

Vermeer's work has this cold quality of rightness to the full. He holds, as it were, a silver mirror up to nature, but he tells no pleasant story as he holds it. His work is as intensely personal as any that was ever done, but it affords a personality unconsciously disengaged during the making process, — a sort of by-product, as it were; that is, the exhibition of personality is purely unconscious. Personality as shown in the choice of subject, in the arrangement of colours, in the rendering of colour values, and of edges, is there; but it does not appear in little airs and graces of indication or of handling. It is true that even the handling is very personal; but it happens to be so either from its restraint or from certain desperate remedies, like his *pointillé* work, where he is so earnest in getting in certain effects that he is willing to risk the consistency of handling in his canvas.

There is a tendency among too many artists to

## THE ART OF JAN VERMEER

adore warm picturesque personalities. To such men Rembrandt is a delight — not so much on account of his painting as from his curious life. These men adore Goya because he was a bull-fighter. They must have the work of a man rich, warm, passionate. They are not so much interested that it should be right. Indeed, most of us have forgotten that there is a beauty in rightness: that indeed there is really no beauty without it. For true beauty one would say is built upon the normal, and surely a picture that is not right can hardly be called normal.

The favourite cry of this sort of artist is that a man's work is "cold" if, perchance, it is carefully made. No amount of good work is forgiven if it is "cold." Now, one would say that the truest artist must of necessity be cold; or rather, that his white-hot heat is fire under ice. He is so dead in earnest to get the look of the thing that he does not worry to get the lesser affectations of wanton handling.

Vermeer at least is of this sort. One must not expect of him cunning little affectations, taking mannerisms or engaging graces. He simply painted right on, striving to get the appearance of things. He seems to have conceived and ordered



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

the best arrangement of line and colour that he could achieve, and then have rendered it as truly as it was in him to do.

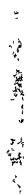
In trying to determine whether a picture is or is not by Vermeer we have certain details to help us. For instance, there is the famous lion-headed chair which appears in at least ten of his pictures; there is a little white jug of a particular shape which appears in four; there is a stained-glass window of a special design which appears in four or five; there are the various rugs, painted in a peculiar manner and placed in a special, rumpled way in the composition; there is the Vermeer map, painted as only he could paint it and placed in a certain manner in relation to the figures. If one found a picture with only one of these things in it, that would not prove much, but if one found all five it would go far to make one think one had found a Vermeer. It recalls the Bertillon System: one detail may not matter much, two matter a great deal, three are almost conclusive. It is not a very artistic way of arriving at a decision, but it helps one to prove one's point.

Then there are things less commonplace but to

**JAN VERMEER OF DELFT**  
**WOMAN WEIGHING PEARLS OR GOLD**

**COLLECTION OF P. A. B. WIDENER, PHILADELPHIA**

JAN VERMEER OF DELFT  
WOMAN WEIGHING PEARLS OR GOLD  
Collection of P. A. B. Widener. Philadelphia





## THE ART OF JAN VERMEER

the artist just as conclusive. For instance, the recently discovered Vermeer now owned by Mr. Widener had but few of these marks. But the woman's figure is placed on the canvas in relation to the window, to the table and to the picture behind in exactly the way Vermeer so often placed things, and in a way rather different from the placement of other artists. Then there is the placing of the window to the extreme left; Rembrandt has done something of this sort, but not quite the same.

But in addition to all these things, and what counts rather more than anything in an artist's eyes, is the colour. A man may look at a photograph of a picture for a long time without coming to a decision, but the minute he sees the colour of it his mind is made up at once: there is a peculiar colour quality in Vermeer, a "blonde" look which no one else of his time got, and which materially helps in making up one's mind.

But there is not only the colour quality to help, but the colour arrangement as well. No one could look at the *Lace-Maker*, for instance, and doubt for a moment its being a Vermeer, after once noting the colour arrangement. No one of his time happened to make those colour

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

combinations. That colour combination in itself would be enough to decide one unless the other elements were very obviously lacking.

Then there is the manner of making, the *facture*. No one else in Holland would have painted fingers in the way they are made in this same *Lace-Maker*. There is a peculiar blocky rendering of the planes that no one else had. Franz Hals used the square touch, but he used it for exaggerating his high lights, which was not at all Vermeer's method. Many other parts of the picture are also betrayed by the handling.

From all these things it may be seen that it should not be difficult to know a picture by Vermeer.

## **HOLLAND IN VERMEER'S DAY**





## CHAPTER II

### HOLLAND IN VERMEER'S DAY

THAT Holland into which Vermeer was born was, in many respects, not unlike the Holland of to-day. There were the same canals, the same little brick-paved streets, which one sees in De Hooch's pictures, or, for the matter of that, in Vermeer's own. And there were the quaint old houses — in those days not quaint at all — which still survive. These also may be seen in Vermeer's *Street in Delft* and in his *View of Delft*. Indoors, in houses of the humbler kind, the bedsteads were built into the walls, and painted blue, like enough, or some homely colour that assorted well with the grey of the wall. In houses of the better sort there were fine large rooms — sometimes with tessellated floors; the windows, often enough, were of stained glass with quaintly twisted lead work. Rich rugs were to be found, strange to say, on the tables instead of on the floors; and there were fine specimens of Japanese or Chinese

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

*faience* brought from over-seas in the high-masted Dutch ships which controlled the India trade.

For Holland, since the Spanish War, was grown to be a very rich state. War, which to most countries brings poverty, had to her given riches. The Dutch had founded their East India trade on the ruins of that of the Spanish and of the Portuguese; nor had they, as yet, lost it to the English. Many of the merchant families had become rich, and they, and the nobles about them, spent their money freely. Pictures were a hobby of the day, and many a great landowner or merchant was proud of his well-chosen gallery.

The winning of their death struggle with Spain had given to the Dutch a confidence in themselves and a liking and admiration for their country which nothing else can give. It is characteristic of Dutch art that its painters seemed satisfied with what they had about them. While it is true that certain misguided ones went to Italy and there learned of third-rate masters a second-rate style, still, for the most part, Dutch painters seemed very well pleased with their immediate surroundings, and painted them in a way which no one has been able to do since. Nothing that was native and smacked of the soil came amiss to them.

## HOLLAND IN VERMEER'S DAY

There was even a painter who painted toads and lizards and crawling things. Whatever existed and had colour and life seemed to these Dutch painters interesting. Besides the portrait painters, landscape painters and *genre* painters, there were artists who specialised in certain subjects. Wouwerman painted military pictures — one still remembers the white horse he affected. Paul Potter painted animals; the Honthorsts, poultry; Van Huysum, flowers.

Besides these animals, poultry, lizards and dead creatures there were plenty of men and women to be painted, and of a marked and interesting personality.

One guesses that the archers in Hals's and Rembrandt's and Van der Helst's pictures give one a fairly good idea of the type of men who lived and moved in those days. There was another type, too, the more aristocratic type, which Vermeer himself has hinted at in the man who appears in the Windsor Castle *Music Lesson*. This distinguished, rather melancholy young man might have been the Sebastian Van Storck of whom Pater writes so delightfully. Then, too, there was the Spanish type which still persists in Holland, after now these many years. The English, who, nat-

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

urally enough, did not like the Hollanders, have given us a rather false idea of them. Doubtless there exist plenty of the heavy phlegmatic schnapps-drinking Dutchmen whom so many English writers have caricatured; but there are now, and were in Vermeer's day, types much more *raffiné* and distinguished. One gets an idea of what some of them were like from Terburg's marvellous *Peace of Münster*, where the men who posed were diplomats and aristocrats rather than the self-complacent *bourgeoisie* who ruffled it before Hals and Van der Helst.

In a study of Vermeer, however, the types of men are not so important as the types of women; for in his pictures women more often appear. He was not primarily a painter of women in the sense that Gainsborough was, or Watteau; but one guesses it was more convenient for him to get them to pose. Doubtless, too, their more vivid and picturesque costumes made them more fit to be placed as keynotes in his little pictures. It is true that in certain of his pictures the women have a good deal of charm. The *Pearl Necklace* of the Berlin Gallery has something of the Eternal Feminine about her. She is one of a score or more of pictured women whom one cannot forget.

## HOLLAND IN VERMEER'S DAY

But in the main Vermeer's little women serve their turn as a keynote for the picture, simply and modestly enough, like true *huisvrouwen*, without unduly calling attention to themselves.

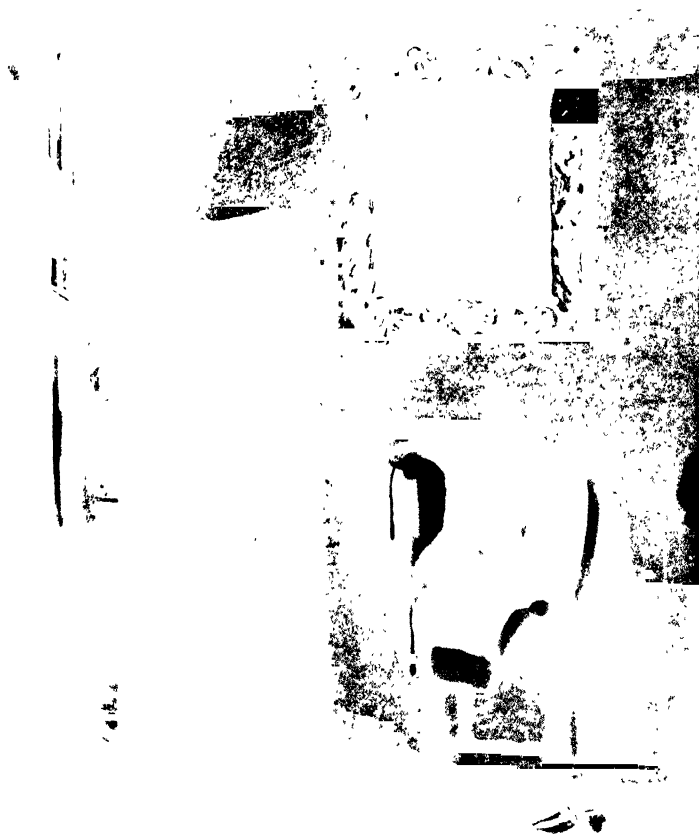
Vermeer often paints a type of woman, — whether he liked it or not one can only guess, — a type which also appears in the work of Terburg. One sees just the same type of woman to this day in Holland. A blonde woman, with full rounded forehead, a *retroussé* nose and a rather retreating chin. These little women are not beautiful according to Greek standards, but they are quite typical of the Holland of Vermeer's day — and of today. After all, they had skulls in their heads, and the light fell on them. That gave construction and light and shade to be grappled with, and a man may reveal himself as a great artist by his treatment of these two things alone.

The pictures which the aristocracy and the rich *bourgeoisie* liked were precisely the kind of pictures Vermeer painted. As has been hinted, they liked their own country, they were proud of it and liked to see it portrayed. They were proud of their fine houses with their tessellated floors, their fine rugs and their Chinese vases. Proud, too, they were of

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

their women, with pretty white satin dresses and natty morning jackets trimmed with swansdown. These were the things they delighted in, and these were the things that Terburg and Metzsu and Vermeer delighted to paint. There never was a better instance of cause and effect. The patrons liked certain subjects — the artists painted them. Yet it is quite evident that these subjects were in themselves delightful to the painter. They could hardly have painted them with such gusto, year in and year out, had it not been so. It was not as if they had never known any other sort of subject. Far from it. Certain of them, such as Terburg, were travelled men, who had been in Italy and in Spain, but who yet, having seen what they had seen, deliberately preferred to paint the sort of conversation-piece that delighted the rich Dutch buyers.

And they could have advanced excellent reasons for preferring this sort of subject to any other. A conversation-piece after all was not, in subject, so much removed from the sacred conversations and *concerts champêtres* of the Venetians — motifs universally recognised as among the most supremely artistic subjects which have been done. It is true that the men and women in these Venetian idylls



*Artist unknown. (Wrongly attributed to Jan Vermeer of Delft; possibly by Pieter de Hooch)*

## DUTCH ROOM

KAISER FRIEDRICH MUSEUM, BERLIN





## HOLLAND IN VERMEER'S DAY

were clad in rich stuffs, and that they had a certain grave beauty that only the Venetians knew how to give. But, as has been suggested before, the Dutch admired the quaint, prim beauty of their own women; and enjoyed, too, the fine stiff clothes and stately mansions with quaintly clipped trees which their artificers had made them. So they painted the subjects they had at hand, and in so doing they did very well. It was clever and amusing for a radiant but *borné* Roi Soleil contemptuously to say "*Otez ces magots-là.*" The *mot* is good, but the sentiment is vulgar. For if you choose to be literary we have come to feel that man is as good as man — that the Dutchmen who cut the dykes of their canals were as heroic as the Venetians who merely paddled gondolas in theirs; that the men who fought at Antwerp were as good as those who fought at Lepanto; that the simple Dutch *huisvrouwen* were as good as the Venetian courtesans; that the light that came in through the quaint Dutch window-panes and bull's-eyes was as beautiful as the light that drifted through the dim glassware of Murano. "There's nothing good or ill but thinking makes it so." The Dutch honestly thought their land, their houses, their women were beautiful. And think-

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

ing so with all their might, their painting, too, was beautiful, and so it seems to us.

The men who bought these pictures were men who had adventured in the India trade and had come back with pockets well lined with gold mohurs and with pieces of eight; or rough seafaring men who had stopped the Spanish caravels on the high seas and piled gold bullion and silver ingots, and diamonds from Brazil, into their high-pooed ships; or saturnine aristocrats, rich from the happy ending of the Spanish War. These men were not the rough Dutchmen whom the English saw or imagined; often they were men most refined, who knew their world as well as another, who tasted curiously every form of æsthetic enjoyment then known. These were the men who could go to war over a few precious tulips. They were great collectors of rich wares from China and from Japan. They knew and collected the rich rugs brought on the backs of camels on the caravan routes which their merchants in the Russia trade got at Archangel — or, perchance, venturing greatly, bought at the Great Fair at Nijni-Novgorod. Their seamen, since the Jesuit movement was crushed in Japan, were the only Europeans allowed in Tokio or Nagasaki; and they brought

## HOLLAND IN VERMEER'S DAY

home beautiful Japanese vases, curious furniture, and, it may be now and then, some quaint book of outland prints, or one of the strange wall pictures that the slant-eyed children of the chrysanthemum are wont to hang on their paper walls. They knew and loved many forms of art, and, since to them the art of picture-making was the highest, they always desired to have pictures by the most cunning artists on the high-studded walls of their fine houses. They knew, too, how to place them in their dark frames of wood ornamented by minute crenellated lines, as we can well see in the pictures by Terburg, De Hooch, Metzu and Vermeer. They seldom made great collections, as the rich men of our day are wont to do, but each room in their great houses was fittingly adorned by some conversation piece in its intricately moulded frame. Or it may be, if the owner had a more curious taste, there were here to be seen cocks and hens of a Chinese breed painted by Hondekoeter, or rare flowers by Van Huysums — or even snakes and newts and lizards painted by the eccentric Otto Marseus.

It was not only the great ones of the Dutch world who bought pictures. Everyone bought pictures. John Evelyn says in his Diary: "Roter-

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

dam . . . where was their annual marte or faire so furnished with pictures — especially landscapes and Drolleries as they call those clownish representations that I was amaz'd. Some I bought and sent into England. The reson of this store of pictures and their cheapness, proceeds from their want of land to employ their stock, so that it is an ordinary thing to find a common Farmer lay out two or £3000 in this commodity. Their houses are full of them and they vend them at their fairs to very greate gains."

And another Englishman writes of the men of Leyden: "The interior of the Dutch houses is yett more rich than their outside. Not in hangings but in pictures which the poorest there are furnished withal, not a cobbler but hath his toyes for ornament."

It is curious, as Fromentin has pointed out, that though the Dutch had just come through an Homeric struggle with the Spaniards, one would never guess this from their art. There are a few pictures by Wouwerman, it is true, in which soldiers appear, but usually stopping at an inn, or in some *dégagé* attitude. Ruskin speaks with great disgust of some of these fighting pictures, but they are comparatively few. Soldiers, too, appear

## HOLLAND IN VERMEER'S DAY

in Terburg's and in Metzu's pictures, but always in a *genre* sense, so to say, — that is, they are playing cards or dice or loafing in a guard-room or flirting with a woman. When the Dutch were at their best, they seemed to recognise their incapacity for historical or religious composition and to hold firmly to the *genre* which they made so well. It is true that Rembrandt and his pupils did a number of historical and religious pictures, but the most successful of these are ones which, like the *Supper at Emmaus*, are really *genre* pictures. Vermeer himself tried his hand at certain sacred and mythological subjects, but one would say that these are distinctly among the poorest of his works.

What he really made well and what he seemed to love best to make, were sober little compositions of horizontal and vertical lines of wall and picture, broken by some charming arabesque of a little woman engaged at some pleasantly futile task. And this was not merely his own idiosyncrasy. De Hooch did much the same thing, with certain differences in composition which shall be shown later. Terburg, in a different manner, treated much the same subjects, and Metzu, though his taste was not so exquisite and led him

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

into certain aberrations, was still in the main a painter of quiet interiors.

One reason why the Dutch did not attempt to do much religious work was that the Protestant faith was opposed to the decoration of churches by pictures; it was not so very far from the time of the Iconoclasts. And while, as we have seen, artists like Vermeer did an occasional religious picture of an easel painting size, this was comparatively uncommon. So far as one knows, there was no mural decoration of churches. Religious pictures were occasionally painted, but as a rule they were small. Metzger did a few — and they remain among the worst of his career. Vermeer himself painted *Mary and Martha*, and while he has not made himself ridiculous as poor Metzger did, the picture remains one of his less interesting works. It is interesting to note that even when Vermeer ventured into strange seas, his instinctive good taste was a compass which prevented him from running against the rocks of ridicule with so horrible a crash as some of his contemporaries suffered, although the figure of the woman in his *Novum Testamentum* is rather funny.

One of the astounding signs of this time was the number of painters — and good painters — who

## HOLLAND IN VERMEER'S DAY

existed in proportion to the population. There were in all Holland not more than a couple of million souls — not so many as one of our great cities holds — and yet what a glorious company of artists existed among them! Besides the very great ones whom we know, there were Otto van Veen of Leyden, who taught Rubens; Abraham Bloemaert of Gorkum, who “painted landscapes and animals in good taste.” There was Cornelis Poellenburg of Utrecht, and worthy pupils of his were Daniel Vertange and Jan van Haensberg. Johan Wynants of Haarlem did his best at landscape and Jan Daniel de Heem of Utrecht was of the company. Among the lesser men who practised the painting of simple souls, such as Vermeer loved to paint, were Pieter van Laar, the two Ostades and Jan Steen. A worthy landscape painter was Jan Both of Utrecht, and Herman Swaneveld of Woerden was not unknown. One of the very few military painters was Asselyn, who painted battles “with a delicate pencil.” Gerard Dou was very famous in his day, and there were those who liked the work of John Fyt, “a painter of beasts.” Benenburg of Utrecht was bravely painting landscapes the while.

We have spoken of Philip Wouwerman; he



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

painted battles and hunting pieces, travellers and robbers. Anton Waterloo had a great vogue at one time. Berghem painted cattle, and Paul Potter, hardly so good as Fromentin seems to think him, did much the same thing. It is one of the humours of artistic criticism, by the way, that Fromentin, certainly among the best and most sympathetic of art writers, should have permitted himself to spend pages on Potter's puerile talent and on the other hand never even mentioned Vermeer.

But returning to our artists, let us speak of Ludolph Backhuysen, who painted storms at sea; of Frans Mieris, who painted tempests in a tea-pot, and of Jan Pieter Slingelandt, who was "hardly less accurate." Most of the painters specialised. Godfrey Schalken of Dort illuminated night scenes. Albert Cuyp at one time was very famous for his sunlit landscapes. Karel du Jardin and Adrian van de Velde essayed the same sort of subject. Van der Neer affected moonlight scenes, and Adrian Van der Werf confectioned delicate trifles. Jacob Van Huysums made very wonderful flower pieces, where drops of water and crawling ants could be seen by the naked eye, and Pieter Van der Hulst of Dort was not far behind. There is

## HOLLAND IN VERMEER'S DAY

not space to speak in detail of all the really good painters, but among them, some better than others, were Cornelius Ketel, Bartholomew Van der Helst, Albert Van Everdingen, Gerbrandt Van der Hendrik, Verschuuring, Maria van Oosterwyck, Willem Kalf, Melchior Hondekoeter, Cornelis de Bruyn, the two Houbrakens, Rachel Ruisch, Cornelis du Sart, Jan de Witt, Cornelis Troost, Van Os, Van Spaendonk, Scheffer, Ommeganck and others. The country pullulated artists. One wonders how they all lived, and yet the curious thing is that this little country absorbed almost all of its own work, for Dutch pictures were not much bought abroad, until later. The Dutch purely loved pictures and bought them when they could — and, as we have seen, even men of small means seem to have collected pictures.



## **VERMEER AND HIS TIMES**



## CHAPTER III

### VERMEER AND HIS TIMES

NOWADAYS one comes into Delft by the railroad into a rather modern railroad station; but it is only a step into the market place with its stone pavement where grass, and now and then a flower, peep pleasantly from the cracks. Everything seems sleepy, the streets, the houses, even the people — except perhaps the small boy who begs a cigar of one and presently lights it. One wanders through old streets, by old canals, seeing here or there through the Scotch mist, at a window or by a door, some woman in quaint costume of blue and yellow not unlike the little figures which Vermeer painted in his *View of Delft*—or without his *House in Delft*. Everything is quiet, almost with the stillness of sleep.

It was not like that in the olden time. One came into the town by the highway, or mayhap was dragged in a great boat up one of the still

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

canals! One entered by a great gate, it may be by the Cow gate or the Hague gate. There were several of these gates then, strongly built and quaint—the Haagsche Poort, the Koe Poort, the Oost Poort, the Schiedam Poort and still others. Strolling about the town one might see the fine Stadt-huis, the Old church and the New—the New church which is now old, since it was built in the fourteenth century. Here there were the Powder Magazines, one of which blew up in Vermeer's day, seriously damaging Delft and, indeed, killing Vermeer's friend Karel Fabritius. Here was the fine East India House which controlled the trade of nearby Delftshaven, and the famous houses named De Kamerelte. Here was the ancient palace of the Princes of Orange with its handsome doorway, and the Theatre of Anatomy, where one would guess Vermeer never studied. And here, one of the few places where we know Vermeer stood, was the handsome Gilde-huis of St. Luke. Vermeer, for four years of his life, was head man of this guild, and often must have passed in and out of the curious doorway; or, perchance, have sat on the outside bench for a moment of a summer's day with De Hooch and Fabritius, noting the round



*Jan Vermeer of Delft*

## A STREET IN DELFT

COLLECTION OF J. SIX, AMSTERDAM





## VERMEER AND HIS TIMES

spots of sunlight, the checkered shade, on the house opposite.

Delft is still one of the quaintest and most picturesque towns of old Holland. Walking along by curious houses that still cry aloud to be painted by De Hooch or De Witte, one does not find it hard to fancy one's self in the days of Vermeer. Fabritius might look from yonder window, and, turning into the cloister of St. Agatha, one almost expects to find Emanuel de Witte painting that famous view of the place which Bürger-Thoré enthusiastically attributed to Vermeer. Here is the spot where William the Silent One fell under the bullet of Balthazar Gerard, — one can still see the pistol bullets splattered against the wall. Silent Delft, the home of silent ones, for our Vermeer lies there too, silent, in some obscure corner of the "Old Church" — no mausoleum for him. Only his work, in still small voice, speaks for him.

Delft was known as far back as the tenth century. It grew and prospered and at the time of Vermeer it was a fine large town. In his day the potteries were the great glory of the place. There were no less than fifty factories of four or more furnaces beside many smaller ones. Delft

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

pottery was one of the glories of Holland and the tiles and *faïence* of that day are still the most sought after of Delft ware.

Dr. Valentiner says that there is a tradition that Vermeer himself sometimes decorated a tile or a vase. For some of these blue and white plaques were adorned with landscapes which one enthusiastic writer says were "worthy of the leading Dutch masters." This we cannot tell absolutely, for since his busy life ended we have hardly a word of Vermeer till Bürger-Thoré rediscovered him. His memory faded away; he was forgotten.

In 1865 Vermeer was practically forgotten. It is true that certain works of his, the *View of Delft* and *The Milkwoman*, were known, and they were known to be by him. But there was much confusion of mind about various painters named Vermeer. There was Van der Meer of Utrecht, the two Van der Meers of Haarlem, as well as Van der Meer or Vermeer of Delft. The difference between these men was not thoroughly understood, and as a rule their works were all lumped together as by the same man. It is inconceivable that this should have been so, but the *cognoscenti* of an older day were not so very knowing, after all.

## VERMEER AND HIS TIMES

M. Bürger-Thoré, who was a distinguished French connoisseur, in going through the museum of the Hague was particularly impressed by the *View of Delft*. It seemed to him, as indeed it is, a very remarkable performance. He could not get it out of his mind, and presently he began to look about him for more Vermeers. Not only was he interested in the work of the man, but something in the mystery which surrounded this artist attracted him. He often calls him the Sphinx of Delft. Bürger-Thoré was a man of leisure who was often in one or another part of Europe, and during his travels he made it a point to look through the galleries for other Vermeers. He had, too, the collaboration of various gentlemen, among them, strange to say, Sir Charles Eastlake, President of the Royal Academy, with whom, somehow, one does not associate the study of Vermeer. With these gentlemen's help — with the help of various Dutch archives and from his own acumen or *flair* he was able to reconstitute a good many Vermeers. In fact, his enthusiasm carried him so far that he permitted himself to attribute some seventy-two pictures to our master, whereas a cooler modern criticism has only allowed some thirty-six or seven. Where Bürger-

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

Thoré made most of his mistakes in attribution, was in the matter of certain landscapes. It is more difficult to decide precisely whether a landscape is by Vermeer or not because his peculiar style of composition is not so obvious in his landscape arrangement as it is in his figure work.

To go back a moment—it is interesting to note that after the *View of Delft*, the next two Vermeers that Bürger-Thoré saw were the *Milk-woman* and the *House in Delft*, or, as he calls it, the *Façade of a Dutch House*. These two pictures were at that time in the “Cabinet,” as Sir Joshua would say, of Mynheer Six van Hillegom.

Bürger-Thoré was mixed up in the affairs of '48 and was forced to leave France. This gave him a chance to go over the galleries of Europe with great thoroughness.

The next two Vermeers which he discovered were the *Head of a Young Girl* in the Arenberg collection and a certain *Cottage* in the Cabinet of M. Suermondt; this latter, alas, is not now considered to be by Vermeer, though Bürger-Thoré says it is “delicious.”

By 1860 Bürger was able to mention in his book on the museums of Holland about twelve Vermeers, including the ones already mentioned

**JAN VERMEER OF DELFT**  
**A VIEW OF DELFT FROM THE ROTTERDAM**  
**CANAL**

**ROYAL PICTURE GALLERY, THE HAGUE**

JAN VERMEER OF Delft  
A VIEW OF Delft FROM THE ROTTERDAM  
CANAL

ROYAL PICTURE GALLERY, THE HAGUE







## VERMEER AND HIS TIMES

and also the *Lace-Maker*, now in the Louvre, the *Coquette* of the Brunswick Gallery, the *Reader* of the Dresden Gallery, and the *Courtesan* of the same gallery.

Bürger not only discovered many Vermeers, hidden in the galleries of Cologne, Brunswick, Berlin, Dresden and Vienna, he did more. He had so far the courage of his convictions that he bought several and persuaded his friends to buy others. One feels as one does in reading Balzac's "Cousin Pons," that it must have been good to live in those times, when birds of such a feather were on every bush.

Among the pictures which Bürger acquired was an *Old Woman with a Reel*. This was offered to the National Gallery for £157.10s but was declined. Bürger then bought it himself, but resold it to an English dealer, since when it has disappeared.

But the prize of his collection was the *Young Lady with the Pearl Necklace*, now at the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin. This picture will presently be described; it is one of the most purely beautiful pictures ever painted.

Bürger also owned the *Young Lady at the Virginals*, which is now in the National Gallery, as

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

well as another *Young Lady at a Spinnet*, which is also now owned in London. Bürger at one time also owned the excellent little Vermeer which is now in the Gardner Collection.

Having got his subject well in hand, Bürger published, in 1866, a series of articles about Vermeer in the *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, and this series may be said to have begun Vermeer's modern vogue. It must be remembered that he was not really absolutely forgotten. Certain very well informed men knew of some of his pictures.

A. Paillet and H. Delaroche, writing of a sale in Paris, 1809, in regard to the picture now called the *Reader* of the Ryjks Museum in Amsterdam, say: "This production, although very simple is remarkable for the naïve expression of the face and the effect of light—a usual merit of this painter."

At the Sale Lapeyriere, Paris, 1817, M. Perignon says: "The pictures of this artist are extremely rare and sought after."

So that it is wrong to say that our painter was absolutely forgotten in the minds of all men. But he was practically forgotten. It was no disgrace for a man of culture not to have heard of him. Indeed, since beginning to write this book

## VERMEER AND HIS TIMES

the writer has been asked by a number of excellent people who Vermeer of Delft might be.

The curious thing about Vermeer is that though he was presently to be so well forgotten, he was, in his own day and generation, an important man, — a well-known artist and, as modern writers love to say, a prominent citizen of Delft. His pictures were admired and brought good prices; indeed, with the exception of Gerard Dou's work, they seem to have commanded higher prices than the work of other men.

These things we know from various sources. A certain Dirck van Bleyswyck conceived the idea of writing of the glories of Delft in some thousand of pages. This he did, and in this book we find the name of Jan Vermeer, although the latter was, at the time of writing, still a very young man. Again, Van Bleyswyck's publisher, Arnold Bon, felt called upon, at the death of Karel Fabritius, to write a poem deploring his loss. In this poem he refers to Vermeer as a phoenix who, filled with the spirit of Fabritius, rose, as it were, from the flames of the exploding powder magazine to continue his work. For the unfortunate Fabritius had been blown up while painting, by

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

a powder magazine which chanced to explode near by, and the excellent Bon, plunged in grief as he doubtless was by the death of his friend, seems to have found a sad satisfaction in comparing his death to that of the phoenix, who, the ancient legend hath it, did, at times, expire in a fire of woods more sweet-scented, one would guess, than villainous saltpetre; from the ashes would rise another phoenix, and it pleased the melancholy Bon to name Vermeer as Fabritius' *alter ego*.

We also find in the records of the Guild of St. Luke of Delft that Vermeer was not only a member in good report but was indeed at least four times the "head man" ("hooftmann") of the Guild. Evidently, then, the artists of Delft recognised him at his proper worth and delighted to do him honour.

Again, a certain Balthazar de Monconys, who appears to have been a French gentleman of some fortune not above turning a penny by selling pictures, chancing to be travelling in Holland at that time, mentions in his account of his travels that he visited Jan Vermeer at his house, desiring to see some of his pictures; but the latter, having none on hand, Monconys

## VERMEER AND HIS TIMES

was obliged to go to a certain baker near by. But let us tell it in his own words: "At Delphes," (*sic*) he writes, "I saw the painter *Vermer* who had no single one of his works — but we saw one at the home of a baker who had paid six hundred livres for it — although it only had one figure."

One would suppose that a painter honoured and sung, who sold all his pictures and who was visited by travelling foreigners, — and is not foreign fame said to be contemporaneous immortality? — one would think that such a man would have been remembered by his countrymen. But no; within fifty years of his death Vermeer was quite forgotten.

The reason of this is a rather curious one. Houbraken, the gossiping old Vasari of Holland, for some reason chose to leave Vermeer out of his history of Dutch Painters. He mentions countless daubers of the most mediocre talent, but for some reason, he leaves out Vermeer. He must have known of his work, for it is evident from the sale of Vermeer's pictures in Amsterdam that he was known outside of Delft. Perhaps the men had quarrelled; apparently we shall never know the reason of the omission; but

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

it is a rather humiliating proof of the value of *réclame*, and of man's indifference to good work unless his attention be directed to it, that this latter omission ended Vermeer. He simply dropped into oblivion. One would have supposed that the mere virtue of his pictures would have commanded attention; and in a measure it did. For whenever these pictures appeared at a sale they almost invariably commanded good prices, although by a little known man.

But a reputation cannot be built up by a few sales. A reputation is made because one man, in print, says another man is good; or nowadays, when he says he himself is good, as did Whistler. But Houbraken, maliciously or no, had omitted to whisper the open sesame, and the hall of fame was closed to Vermeer.

It is humiliating to find that most writers on art do not form their opinions at first hand but from reading the works of other men, who doubtless knew no more than they. All the other writers on art industriously copied Houbraken, at great loss, one would think, of ink and paper, since they wrote nothing new. The discursive Campo Weyermann, prolix to boredom about nonentities, remains blankly silent about the

## VERMEER AND HIS TIMES

greatest painter who had lived. A certain Van Goll consumed an enormous number of pages in leaving out Vermeer.

Since the *cognoscenti* had forgotten Vermeer, it became necessary to attribute his pictures to some one else. It was a sort of amiable partition of Poland. One cannot blame the admirable gentlemen who blandly gave one Vermeer to Rembrandt, another to Terburg and yet a third to De Hooch. It was a partition of No Man's Land. How could they be expected to suspect a great painter since they could not read his name in a book? A number of the pictures were signed and so could not be attributed to Rembrandt *et aliï*; but our connoisseurs invented a subtle form of torture for poor Vermeer's shade by attributing these to other Vermeers of other cities. There were the Vermeers, father and son, of Haarlem. There was a certain Vermeer of Schoonhoven who lived in Utrecht — a worthy man who also was not only a common councilman, but peddled out ship licenses.

It is true that the work of these good men did not in any way resemble the pictures of the "Sphinx of Delft." None the less, their names



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

received what weak adulation was still paid to the idolons of Vermeer.

Sir Joshua Reynolds in his notes of a Journey to Flanders and Holland speaks of seeing in "the Cabinet of Mr. Le Brun" among other things "A Woman pouring milk from one vessel to another" by D (*sic*) Vandermeere. Apparently he was not greatly impressed, for later he volunteers this information: "The most considerable of the Dutch School are Rembrandt, Teniers, Jan Steen, Ostade, Brouwer, Gerard Dow, Mieris, Metzu and Terburg. These excel in small conversations." Vermeer was again forgot!

Bürger-Thoré has the credit, and rightly so, of exhuming poor Vermeer from the ash bin, so to say, of Houbraken's neglect. He reconstituted him, rebuilt his reputation. At the same time it should not be forgotten that Maxime Du Camp had written in praise of him so far back as 1857 in the *Revue de Paris*. Later Paul Mantz in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* and Théophile Gautier in the *Moniteur* had found admirable words to say.

But after all it was Bürger-Thoré who at the last literally patched together the scattered shreds of reputation of a great man; who scoured Eu-



*Artist: unknown. (Formerly attributed to Jan Vermeer of Delft; probably by Muihel Sweerts)*

## THE LESSON



## VERMEER AND HIS TIMES

rope to find forgotten works by him, and who in the end did, to use the homely phrase, make a new man of him.

The most cruel part of the neglect of Vermeer is that his pictures suffered even more than his reputation. If a man owned a Terburg he took good care of it. It was a name; it meant something—it even meant money. But pictures by an unknown artist, by Vermeer in short, meant simply nothing. They were neglected; it is only too probable that they were sometimes destroyed. Only an artist can realise the cynical contempt that is felt for any picture that has not a name and a reputation. Pictures are put in obscure corners of dark garrets—things are leaned against them—a hole is made and then—the dust heap and *finis*.

It is sickening to think how many Vermeers have probably actually been destroyed just because Houbraken chose to leave out the “Delftsche’s” name from his precious book. It gives one a new sense of the responsibility of the historian.

It is likely enough that Houbraken was quite genuine in his dislike for Vermeer’s work. He

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

had studied in the school of Rembrandt — of Rembrandt the direct antithesis of Vermeer. Doubtless he really disliked the work of Vermeer because it was smooth, correct and studied.

This, however, does not make it any more endurable that he should have started the conspiracy of silence that for two centuries ruined Vermeer. The wrong is done, though, and we can only regret it and admire the masterpieces of the great unknown.

This story of Vermeer, however, gives us pause. It makes us stop and wonder how many other good men have been wholly forgotten. It is now the fashion to sneer at mute inglorious Miltons, to say that merit will always find recognition, that a man takes his proper level. Well, here we have this fact: that Vermeer, in many ways the most accomplished of painters, was for two hundred years practically forgotten. If the best of painters can be forgotten simply because a criticaster, if one may coin the word, ignores him, what is one to say? One is forced to believe, however unwillingly, that reputations are largely a matter of friendly puffing and *réclame*.

And yet, for all this, there is something fine in the thought that, despite the foolishness and neg-

## VERMEER AND HIS TIMES

lect of men, Vermeer's art did still persist, and at length win its way to fame against all odds. To be sure, it needed the recognition and praise of Bürger-Thoré to come to its own. But that was as a lighted match thrown into a smouldering pile; it will start up the whole thing into fire and flame. Vermeer's pictures were there, some few still identified; the *View of Delft*, the *Milkwoman*, and one or two others were so good that recognition was in the end inevitable.

And in this age of self advertising and exploitation it is pleasant to think of works winning recognition in the end simply through their own beauty. Vermeer's forgotten dust lay peaceably enough under the old church at Delft; but there were these pictures of his, neglected or ill-treated, but still there, silently beautiful in themselves, without adventitious aid or *réclame* — shining, as it were, with an interior fire. It only needed the man — a man with such sympathy and enthusiasm as had Bürger-Thoré — to catch the fire they had to give.

It is a curious irony of fate that the painter of all others who loved the clear crystalline light of day and painted it as it bathed and revealed all

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

things in a room, — that this simple, direct man, apparently quite without pose, should have become the most mysterious of painters. Rembrandt, the painter of mystery, is no mystery to us. He who will may read of his tiresome or discreditable doings. But Vermeer — the painter of daylight — is engulfed in darkness. We know practically nothing of him, which is perhaps well enough, only it is strange, as there was evidently nothing mysterious about him. They say a man can best hide himself from men in a great city. And so Vermeer — going his ways simply enough in the good town of Delft, doing his duties apparently as head man of the Guild and father of a family — has managed to remain in most particulars quite unknown to us.

Bürger-Thoré devoted most of his time to re-discovering lost pictures by Vermeer. He did also, however, make an attempt to search the archives of Delft for details of the life of his hero. The librarian of the archives pretended that he could find nothing worth while, and the amiable Bürger took him at his word, and thought that nothing good could come from that source. Later, however, M. Henry Havard managed to get at the archives, which happen to

## VERMEER AND HIS TIMES

be remarkably full and well made out. By incessant study of the records he and his coadjutor M. Obreen were able to find a number of interesting details. For instance, they found the record of Vermeer's birth and the record of his marriage.

We find this record of his birth on October 31st, 1632:

"A child Joannis. The father is Reynier son of Jan. The mother, Dingnum, daughter of Balthazar: the witnesses are Pieter Brammer, Jan son of Heyndrick, and Martha, daughter of Jan."

There is a biblical directness and brevity about this which is refreshing.

Later, April 5th, 1653, we have the record of our Vermeer's marriage:

"Johannes, son of Reynier Vermeer, celibate, living at the market place—to Catharina Bolenes, maiden, from the same locality."

Also at the Royal Library of The Hague was discovered the "Masterbook" of the Guild of St. Luke of Delft. Here was found record of Vermeer's joining the Guild, on the 29th of December, 1653, as master painter. "And for the right of mastership he has payed 1 florin, four



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

sous — still owing 4 florins, 10 sous." "On the 24th of July 1656 he has payed in full."

In 1662 the book tells us that Vermeer was made "head-man" of the Guild. This position he held for two years. Later, in 1670 and 1671 he is again made head man.

After this there is only one record found in the archives — the last a man can have; for on December 13th, 1675, we find these grim words:

"Jan Vermeer, artist painter — living on the old long dike, (buried) at the Old Church."

Then a marginal note tells us that he left eight children, — under age.

These are the definite things we know of Vermeer and we know nothing more of importance.

We do not know with absolute certainty who was the master of Vermeer.

Much is said about the probable influence of Karel Fabritius on Vermeer, but it is to be doubted if this were very great. To begin with, the technique of the two men is quite different. That of Fabritius is rather scrappy and casual, while Vermeer's is, without exception, thoughtful and considered. It may be that Fabritius influenced Vermeer in effort for originality, for cer-



*Karel Fabritius*

THE GOLDFINCH  
ROYAL PICTURE GALLERY, THE HAGUE



## VERMEER AND HIS TIMES

tainly Fabritius was, in composition, one of the most original of the Hollanders. His *Goldfinch* is one of the most original things of his time. But Fabritius' composition, for all its originality, suggests Rembrandtesque as well as certain Italian influences, while Vermeer's suggests no one unless it be the Japanese. After all, what Vermeer's art has to tell us is of exquisitely subtle values, of an intuition for colour values, a certain most original sense of arrangement in line, light and dark and balance of colour. In all these things Vermeer is absolutely different from Fabritius.

It is very easy to see in the work of a man so original as Velasquez the marked influence, first of Herrera, then of Pacheco, and later of El Greco. But it is quite impossible to see any such marked resemblance between the work of Fabritius and of Vermeer. About all one can say is that they were both extremely original men, but they were original in quite different ways.

Indeed, Vermeer's very great qualities seem to have been those which cannot be taught. He evidently had been grounded in the solid Dutch technique. His knowledge of light and shade doubtless came primarily from someone's sound

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

teaching. His works are always started in solid light and shade; yet it is evident that he developed a sensitiveness to *chiaroscuro* far beyond that possessed by any man in Holland. That sensitiveness, then, was a quality all his own. Again his intuition of colour is quite different from that of any other Hollander. It begins from other sources. One does not recall any other Dutchman who had quite the same sensitiveness to cool tones. Vermeer, indeed, if he erred at all, erred on the side of coolness; while one may almost generalise in saying that the other Lowlanders erred in making their stuff too hot.

What has given rise to the supposition that Fabritius may have been the master of Vermeer is, as we have seen, a poem by Arnold Bon deploring the unfortunate death of Fabritius. Toward the end of this poem Bon intimates that Vermeer, whom he cites as a young artist formed by Fabritius, may be the man to carry on the work and accentuate the glory of the dead man.

But it seems that Fabritius was only thirty years old when he was killed, and moreover had only been received into the Guild of St. Luke of Delft one year before Vermeer. He could hardly

## VERMEER AND HIS TIMES

then, it would appear, have taught the other long. What seems a more probable hypothesis is that the two young men were friends and that the elder in certain ways influenced the younger. The story of one artist friend who died and of the other who reaped his glory is an old one and has been many times repeated. One thinks, in this connection, of Giorgione and Titian, of Gericault and Delacroix, of Girtin and Turner.

What seems a plausible idea is that Vermeer may have been a pupil of Leonard Bramer, a painter of Delft. The reasons for this supposition are these. On the birth certificate of Vermeer is found, as we have seen, the name of a certain Pieter Bramer. It is supposed that he may have been a brother to Leonard Bramer. The fact that his name is on this certificate shows that he must have been a friend of the Vermeer family, and if he were Leonard Bramer's brother, it seems natural enough that the family should have apprenticed the young Jan Vermeer to Leonard Bramer. The weak point of all this reasoning is that we have no definite reason for supposing the two Bramers were brothers. But Bramer was not a common name

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

in the Delft records — and it just so happens that Bramer's technique and idiosyncrasies are just of the sort which would have fitted him to be the master of Vermeer. He had travelled much in Italy and while there had fallen in with Adam Elzheimer, whose personality had much affected him. Later, on returning to Holland, he had become the friend of Rembrandt. But even before meeting Rembrandt, he had become a passionate searcher into the laws of light and shade — of *chiaroscuro*, as the writers of an older day loved to call it. He was not a painter of the first rank, but his pictures, bathed in light and air, held figures of a certain distinction. Certainly he might have been able to teach Vermeer the elements of his art, particularly that matter of *chiaroscuro* which was always so strong an element in Vermeer's work.

While we have no very exact data about who Vermeer's master might have been, we do know a good deal about the manner in which he was taught. That is, we know something of the way in which all young painters in Holland between 1620 and 1700 were taught.

Recent researches have brought to light many

## VERMEER AND HIS TIMES

interesting details about the manner of teaching then in vogue. Curiously enough, it did not differ very much from the methods now in practice. This is an important bit of news for the many who criticise present modes of teaching.

To begin with, the young student drew a good deal from "the flat"; that is, from another drawing or from an engraving. This has gone out of fashion nowadays, but there is something to be said for it; especially if the designs to be copied are well selected. The student learns a good deal about proportion and a simple way of suggesting the appearance of things, before he is confronted with the overpowering detail of nature.

Then the student was made to draw for some time from the cast—casts made from the antique and also hands, feet and arms cast from the living model. It is recorded that Rembrandt had in his studio, twenty or more hands cast from nature. These were among many other casts which he kept in his studio for the use of his students. The young artist was often caused to "draw limbs in plaster the size of life and also larger."

We know this detail, that the cast was generally studied, from the many paintings and en-



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

gravings which exist, representing young artists drawing from the plaster. There is one, in particular, by Metz, representing a lady in the act of copying a cast.

There was a good deal of drawing, too, from the *écorché* or anatomy-figure. Again, it may be said that it is a pity that this is not done more in the schools at the present day. There are many modern artists who have but the vaguest idea of what the bones and muscles in an arm may be. And their drawing shows it. The study of anatomy was difficult in those days and this difficulty may account, in part, for the passion with which that study was pursued. It is recorded that Aert Mytens, an artist of sorts, cut down a gallows bird and carried him home in a sack that he might dissect him.

Perspective was also studied with enthusiasm — chiefly from Albert Dürer's treatise, though later, various compendiums were written by other men.

There exist two very interesting pictures by Sweerts. One represents drawing from the cast, the other students working from the life. The latter, except for the antique costumes and surroundings, looks not unlike a modern life-school.

## VERMEER AND HIS TIMES

It is notable in this connection, that while the Dutch seldom treated the nude in art, they realised the importance of its study in the making of a draughtsman.

The chief difference from a modern school which one notices in this picture of Sweerts is the extreme youth of the students. They look to be from fifteen to sixteen years of age. Artists began their career while still very young in those days.

The young artist was usually apprenticed to some painter of importance. Doubtless Vermeer learned his trade in this way. There was quite a definite and fixed form of apprenticeship, probably the outcome of mediæval regulation.

While we have not any exact record of Vermeer's student days, we know in a general way how a young artist was apprenticed. He was usually bound to an artist for a term of two years. His parents or guardians paid the artist a certain sum for instruction which varied in different cases. We know that Rembrandt, Gerard Dou and Honthorst had a hundred florins a year for a scholar. Ferdinand Van Apshoven, a lesser man, had the equivalent of £3.14s. In return the artist agreed to give food, lodging and instruc-

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

tion in painting. In Rembrandt's house each student had a room. Others were not always so fortunate.

The artist expected the student to make copies for him and to work on accessories in the master's pictures. The student, however, was generally allowed to paint one picture a year for himself. An amusing detail in these contracts was that the student's father was often required to bring a yearly present of a barrel of herring.

In Michael Mierevelts' studio in Delft the students made copies of his work which he signed as by himself. This was not considered dishonourable in those days.

Instruction in painting usually began by making the young artist grind the colours, clean and "set" palettes and stretch canvases. Great stress was laid on understanding all these details of the art. Artists made their own colours and materials. And it was not till 1643 that a fine-arts dealer, Volmarijn by name, opened a shop in Leyden for the sale of "prepared and unprepared colours, panels, canvas and painting utensils of all kinds." But despite shops of this sort, Dutch painters for the most part continued preparing

## VERMEER AND HIS TIMES

their own materials till the beginning of the nineteenth century.

We know from the inventory of Vermeer's effects that he had a stone table for mixing colours. Presumably he had a boy — either an apprentice or one of his eight children — mixing colour most of the time. That stone table for mixing was an institution in most Dutch studios.

After training in preparation of materials, the student was finally allowed to copy a picture, usually one by the master himself. There is a good deal to be said for this manner of instruction, for the student learned good habits of painting, — how to mix tones, how to lay the paint on, what means to take to avoid "cracking," — before he was confronted by the overpowering complexity of nature. Of course it tended to make the student paint very much like his master; but in those times this was regarded as a merit, not a defect as nowadays.

Studios varied a good deal according to the means of the artist. The poorer sort often had merely a large room with a north light. The richer artists had large and elaborately furnished rooms. Sometimes the windows were quite handsome as regards the design of the sashes, and a

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

little stained glass was at times let in. Apparently the floor was sometimes of tessellated pavement. One gets an idea of this studio of the better sort from Vermeer's painting in the Czernin Gallery — which represents an artist seated comfortably at his work in a studio of large size and of some pretension.

The materials were curiously like what we use now. One says curiously because, when we think how other mechanical arts have varied and for the most part improved, it is strange to think that the mechanics of painting have not changed at all in the last three hundred years. A round palette was employed, something like what dear old ladies now use to paint with. Rectangular palettes were entirely unknown and unused; nor yet was to be seen the "Duran" palette which modern painters often use.

The Dutch made great case of a spotlessly clean palette. Many painters nowadays seem to take a sort of pride in having their palettes in a filthy condition.

They also took great pains not to have their work get dusty. They often hung a cloth over a picture when they were not painting on it, in order to keep the dust off.



*Jan Vermeer of Delft*

PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN  
MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BUDA-PESTH



## VERMEER AND HIS TIMES

The painters of those days had no *godets* or oil cups as we call them; rather they had a bowl or cup of the "medium" near by them and used it as they saw fit. The brushes, mahl-sticks, palette, knife, etc., were much as we have them now except that we very seldom use a mahl-stick in these days.

The easels were more primitive than what we usually employ; that is, they were the ordinary three-legged variety. Indeed, as far as we know, the upright sort did not then exist. The pictures were not set upright as we have them but rather, they were leaned back at an angle on the easel more as we arrange a drawing.

Every artist tried to collect a mass of material which could be used in his pictures. Thus, we find, in the inventory of Vermeer's possessions made after his death, mention is made of seven ells of gold leather hanging, a landscape, a sea piece and a large picture of the crucifixion. All of these pictures have been identified in one or another of his works.

Of Vermeer's life from day to day we know absolutely nothing. We have no engaging anecd-



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

dotes of his idiosyncrasies, none of those sneering accounts of his failings by which mediocrity tries to console itself for lack of talent. Nor have we — and this is more important — any account of what his technical methods were, — of what colours he used or how he laid them on. Had those days been as now, we should have known all about him.

We should have pictures of Vermeer at the age of three, Vermeer at sixteen in his confirmation suit, Vermeer at twenty-three at the time he joined the Guild of St. Luke. More, we should have interviews with him, — what he thought about questions of the day. There would be illustrations — what his front door looked like, the artist in his studio, the artist drinking tea. Our rage for intrusion — our genius for impertinence — would be satisfied.

And yet it is to be doubted if we should be the gainers. Something of the charm of the man lies in his silence. He lived, he died, and nothing is left of him but his work. But that is everything. It is the clear quintessence of genius, purged of the gross lees of anecdotage and statistics. Simply these works remain, the best he could do —

## VERMEER AND HIS TIMES

what he chiefly lived for — the expression of his best. Thrice happy Vermeer! Happy like those nations whose history is unwritten.

The only thing that we really miss and what we miss of almost all good painters, is some account of their method. Time and time again great painters — Giorgione, Da Vinci, Velasquez, Vermeer — have penetrated the inmost temple of art, have stood in the Holy of Holies, have heard the Oracle mutter orphic sayings, have divined the master word and then have come out into the outer world, a baffling smile in their eyes and no word on their lips. They would not tell; did not know it worth the telling. They were too modest to tell.

Of course no man can tell all of his genius, but he can describe his method. And the method of almost all very great painters has been sound and worth the knowing. What we should like to know of Vermeer is what light meant to him; how he himself regarded it; what he thought about his own composition. We know the results he achieved, but we should like to know what he thought of them; how far he felt satisfied; just what he felt he was trying to do. We should like to know whether he consciously

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

tried for certain merits or whether they came to him unconsciously.

Then there are lesser things. It would even be interesting to know what colours he used. In Velasquez' case, for instance, we do know just that because his gossipy old father-in-law Pacheco took the trouble to tell us. But of Vermeer's colours we know nothing except, indeed, the evidences that his pictures give on their own faces. We can guess that he used a sort of yellow lake, and probably a red lake from the vicious way in which it has acted, but that is rather a sorry substitute for knowing all about his ideas on colour.

¶ We should like to know how he set his palette, and how he went about a painting. Indeed, we do know a little bit about this,—or we think we do. In the *Studio* the painter has sometimes been thought to be Vermeer himself. Just how this can be is difficult to reason out since a man can hardly paint the back of his head. It might indeed be managed by a complicated arrangement of mirrors, but in that case it would be hard to achieve such crystalline clearness and such detail as this picture has to show. Besides, we can read the letters on the maps and in a mirror they

## VERMEER AND HIS TIMES

would have a through-the-looking-glass sort of look.

Still, it is just possible that this painter is painting in the manner of Vermeer; and it is evident, from the way he is going to work, that he means to paint *alla prima*. That is, he has drawn in his quaint little subject rather carefully in chalk and is just starting in to paint *de premier coup* on the wreath. This should be rather a shock to those who hold that a picture should be messed in all over before one begins to paint the details. But, after all, it is always possible that the man was not painting in the manner of Vermeer at all. Still it would seem most likely to be a student or a friend.

One of the things which astounds one in the study of Vermeer's work is that it should have been so often mistaken for the work of other men — and such men! It is not difficult to understand that it should have been confused with the work of De Hooch. True, their colour is very different, their handling is absolutely different, but these are things that the so-called expert, who has never learned to paint, can hardly be expected to notice or to know about. Yet

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

these painters' choice of subjects was somewhat alike. Indeed, it is supposed by some that the men worked side by side for some time and it may be that some of De Hooch's paintings were made in Vermeer's house. In one of the De Hooch's in the Wallace Collection, the famous lion's head chair appears and the window and floor look as they do in Vermeer. The treatment of the faces and hands, however, is so different that it is hard to see how any man in his senses should have confused the two painters.

There are one or two Metzus which are alike in subject and costume, but the handling is entirely different. In Metzu the handling is always fused, *legato*, so to say; and this applies, by the way, to the work of Terburg and of De Hooch as well. Vermeer, on the other hand, was often *staccato*. He was, indeed, among the first to paint in a *pointillist* way. Some of his pictures — notably the *Milkwoman* — are full of these minute staccato touches, and one sees the same thing to a lesser degree in the *Studio* of Vienna, in the *View of Delft*, and others. This is only one of the little earmarks that help us to distinguish his work from that of other men.

How Vermeer's work could possibly be con-



*Pieter de Hooch*

INTERIOR, WITH WOMAN AND BOY

WALLACE COLLECTION, LONDON



## VERMEER AND HIS TIMES

fused with that of Jan Steen is hard to see. Vermeer's painting is almost invariably laid in with the square touch. Occasionally this is carried to an extreme as in the *Lace-Maker* and the picture at the Metropolitan Museum. Jan Steen's figures, on the other hand, even at their best, are painted in a stringy, sleazy way, quite different from the rather blocky technique of the other.

Again, it is difficult to understand how anything of Vermeer's could have been attributed to Rembrandt. Vermeer's pictures are almost always cool in tone, while it is perhaps safe to say that Rembrandt never painted a cool picture in his life. Again, the handling is quite different. Rembrandt, apparently, laid his things in with a round brush, without much regard for surface or for neatness of *facture*. Vermeer, on the other hand, started his pictures with a square brush, preserving a smooth surface and showing great solicitude for workmanlike handling. When one looks at the *Woman's Portrait* of Buda-Pesth, it is inconceivable that it should ever have been mistaken for a Rembrandt. The mere painting of the ribbons on the dress is quite different in its square brush work from anything that Rembrandt ever did.



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

Brekelenkamp and Vermeer have been confused in one or two instances. Brekelenkamp is not as well known as he should be. Still he is distinctly a second class painter, though a very interesting one. His colour is quite different, but beside this his method of composition and his workmanship are not at all like Vermeer's.

Philip de Koninck, Aart de Gelder, Nicholas Koedijk and Jean le Duc are names which one supposes to be little known to the average intelligent reader. These worthies did, each in his way, interesting work—but this work in every instance lacked the distinction that always marked the work of Vermeer. Then, of course, in the case of each man the handling and colour quality is fatally different.

Philip de Koninck painted some beautiful landscapes—and in Pater's charming Imaginary Portrait of Sebastian Van Storck that *triste* dreamer is described as having four landscapes by de Koninck. But it is hard to see any connection between his work and that of Vermeer, though his colour was cooler than that of his master Rembrandt—yet withal quite different from the quality of Vermeer.

As to Aart, or Arent, de Gelder he again was

## VERMEER AND HIS TIMES

one of the numerous pupils of Rembrandt. Why poor Vermeer should ever have been confused with him is one of the mysteries of art. For while we admire Vermeer's cold severity of taste which made him put as few accessories as possible into his pictures, the good Arent, on the other hand, painted in a studio that looked like a pawnbroker's shop — so full was it of swords, banners and trumpets hinting at "the drums and tramlings of a thousand conquests." Moreover he painted historical and religious subjects, whereas we shall presently see that our Vermeer painted but few of these, and those few with no great credit to himself.

Koedijk is not so hard to understand because his pictures do seem rather like those of De Hooch. To be sure, De Hooch is not Vermeer, still there is enough similarity between the men to explain why a distracted critic, at his wit's ends, should attribute a Vermeer to Koedijk despite the fact that in technique, colour and composition they are quite different.

Jan le Duc again hardly reminds one of Vermeer — even though certain worthies have confused one with the other. His military pictures, his ruffling *Corps de Garde*, his shuffling card

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

players, hardly suggest the quiet, hushed interiors of Vermeer. Still less do his cattle pieces suggest the master of Delft. The imagination staggers at the thought of Vermeer painting a cow.

In 1749 the catalogue of a Dutch sale, in mentioning one of Vermeer's pictures says of it: "As good as an Eglon Van der Neer." These things, even after two hundred and seventy years would make one's blood boil if they were not so funny.

The excellent Eglon — who really was a very skilful painter, did, indeed, quite successfully imitate Terburg and Netscher. Since he had not read about Vermeer it doubtless did not occur to him to imitate the latter. Still, it seems rather hard that the imitator of an imitator should be accounted better than one of the few great originals among painters.

It was left to an ingenious engraver to attribute Vermeer's *Girl Reading* of the Dresden Museum, to Govaert Flinck; the man actually engraved the thing — studied it, day after day, and then attributed it to Flinck. One wonders why he did not attribute it to Salvator Rosa and be done with it. Flinck of all men, with his violent Rembrandtesque technique, is the last



*Jan Vermeer of Delft. (Authenticity not established)*

PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG MAN  
MUSEUM OF BRUSSELS



## VERMEER AND HIS TIMES

artist one would think of in connection with Vermeer.

How anyone who has ever studied the *Isaac and Jacob* of the Ryks Museum or any other well known Flinck and has noted the peculiarities of handling can attribute a fine picture by Vermeer, with its beautiful, serene technique to this violent maker of *pastiches*, passes belief or understanding.

*The Head of a Man*, of the Brussels Museum, which many now suppose to be painted by Vermeer, was at one time by Dr. Bredius attributed to Jan Victoors.

Jan Victoors, sometimes called Fictoor or Fictoors, was a pupil of Rembrandt and painted the usual sort of Rembrandt subject, for among his pictures we find *The Pork Butcher*, *Tobias Blessing His Son*, *Tobias Recovering His Sight*, etc. He has the usual merits, the usual defects of Rembrandt's pupils. Doubtless he painted a rather good head, but doubtless also he was hardly in Vermeer's rank as a painter.

Just why any picture by the unfortunate Vermeer should have been confused with either of the Mostaerts, remains veiled in obscurity. Neither of these excellent twins was a remarkable painter, and what is more they painted, for the

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

most part, what was rather uncommon in Holland, and that is religious pictures; *Christ on the Cross*, *Ecce Homo*, and pictures of that sort. Also, they painted a series of landscapes illustrating the twelve months of the year. Neither sort of subject seems to be characteristic of Vermeer. While Vermeer was painting May it would have got to be January. Any facility was not in his line.

Bürger-Thoré in striving to correct the unfortunate attributions of Vermeer's work to lesser men fell into the almost equally depressing error of attributing the work of lesser men to Vermeer. We find him ascribing various works to Vermeer which later criticism assigns to De Witte or Van der Neer. Some others are even less known, as C. A. Renesse or Dirck Jan Van der Laan. The thought occurs to one that if the work of these men was good enough to be ascribed to Vermeer it must have been pretty good or else Bürger was a poor critic.

De Man was at Delft at the same time with Vermeer and doubtless knew him, but this does not seem a valid reason for Bürger's attributing one of his works to Vermeer. His travels in Italy had given his work a more Italian flavour than

## VERMEER AND HIS TIMES

had most of the other men — and certainly most of his works do not suggest Vermeer at all.

The subjects of Boursse by their simplicity might possibly suggest Vermeer, but they have none of his distinction or his technical skill and one does not know what Bürger-Thoré was thinking of when he attributed one of his timid works to the prodigious Vermeer. Certainly his picture in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin has a rather superficial resemblance to Vermeer's *House in Delft*. But when one comes to look it over one sees that it is painted in quite a different way.

De Witte's sense of light was so delicate and charming that one understands Bürger's mistake in attributing one of his pictures to Vermeer. One understands, but it is hard to forgive, for really there is not the slightest connection between the two men. Some of De Witte's church interiors are quite beautiful. But there is really no analogy between these and Vermeer's works, except that both kinds are painted in a rather cool high key. The figures painted by the two men are quite different in every way, and De Witte's edges have a hardness which Vermeer avoided.





# **CHARACTERISTICS OF VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE**



## CHAPTER IV

### CHARACTERISTICS OF VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE

VERMEER'S manner of painting varied somewhat during different periods of his life. The *Courtesan* or *Procuress*, which is apparently the earliest of his known works, is painted with a rather heavy hand; it is seemingly quite directly made,—it may even be started *de premier coup*. It is to be noted that all Vermeer's earlier pictures are more heavily and perhaps more directly painted than are his later ones.

Various of his later works seem to have been painted on a canvas prepared with blue, or it may be in certain instances with green. There is no other way to account for the curious bluish or greenish tonality that some of his pictures have taken on. Besides, in some cases, one can see the ground through the canvas. These things are particularly noticeable in the *Lady at the Virginals* of the National Gallery and the *Woman at the Casement* of the Metropolitan Mu-

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

seum. In the first of these the tonality is a distinct green. And the writer well remembers the shock he experienced on first seeing it. In the Metropolitan picture the general tone is bluish, and, while one is well aware that Vermeer loved the colour blue and that the picture is conceived on a blue keynote, still it would almost seem that a blue ground does, to some measure, show through.

He apparently used some sort of yellow lake — gamboge possibly, which faded away to a greater or less extent. In the National Gallery picture it is also evident that the picture has been mercilessly cleaned. Someone has rubbed and scrubbed it till little of the overpainting remains.

It should be remarked here, that pictures by the little Dutch masters suffer particularly from the cleaner. It was the Dutch method to start the picture quite solidly, using, for the most part, opaque colours and leaving the edges fairly sharp. Then all sorts of glazes and scumbles, principally glazes, were used to bring the edges together and to give the beautiful rich colour that the best Dutch pictures possess.

Many picture cleaners have a way of using a solvent, — often alcohol and turpentine mixed, —

**JAN VERMEER OF DELFT**  
**THE PROCURESS, OR THE COURTESAN**  
**THE PICTURE GALLERY, DRESDEN**









## VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE

to clean off the dirt and also to dissolve the varnish which may have been laid over a dirty canvas. The picture is cleaned with little wads of absorbent cotton called *tampons*, soaked with the cleaning mixture; and the utmost skill and intelligence is required to do it properly. A modern picture, painted directly, without glazes, may be cleaned quite successfully by this process, but when it comes to cleaning a Dutch picture with its delicate glazes, one doubts if the game is worth the candle. One has seen a fine Metzu quite ruined by a so-called expert who undertook to clean it. At all events, certain of Vermeer's pictures have been greatly injured by stupid cleaning.

There are various earmarks of Vermeer's technique which he who runs may read; for instance, a quality not unlike the famous "square touch" that was so much in vogue twenty years ago. This is particularly noticeable in certain pictures like the *Lace-Maker* in the Louvre and the *Woman at the Casement* of the Metropolitan Museum, but one gets traces of it in nearly all of his pictures. For instance, the ribbons of the *Woman's Portrait* of Buda Pesth are done in this manner, so much so that one wonders how any-

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

one ever dreamed of attributing it to Rembrandt. One gets glimpses of it, too, in parts of the *Studio* of the Czernin Gallery, and in the Berlin *Pearl Necklace*. In others it is not so manifest. Yet it is apparent that Vermeer started his pictures in this way, even when he later modelled them into more rounded forms. Little things like this may seem quite unimportant, yet it is by the study of little things that we are able to build up a conclusion about a man. For instance, Rembrandt apparently always painted with a round brush. Certainly his pictures have that appearance. And this is one of the many reasons for rejecting Bürger-Thoré's supposition that Rembrandt was the master of Vermeer. For students are most apt to ape little tricks of the master, — what kind of brush he uses, what palette he affects.

Franz Hals also, as is well known, used the square touch. But with Hals it was used to give *brio* to his lights, almost always laid on a well-modelled surface, — to give an exaggerated force to the high light. With Vermeer, it was the quiet, careful, studied placing of one flattish plane by another, and the subsequent brushing of the edges together.

## VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE

In the *Lace-Maker* this method extends even to the way the hair is painted — the fingers and the bits of coloured silk. One notes it particularly in the fold of the sleeve of the girl's right arm. It is this quality, among other things, which gives Vermeer his surprisingly modern look — for that method of handling is more like the moderns than it is like most of the old Dutchmen.

Vermeer, however, had another touch which he often used in one picture. He seems to have used a small round brush to give a succession of staccato touches where he felt the need of brilliancy or a suggestion of richness. This technique sometimes appears in the same canvas with his square touch but more often not. He seems to have used it most in his early period, or perhaps his early middle period would be more precise. He did, however, occasionally use it even so late as what appears to be his latest known picture, the *Studio*. Here most of the picture is made with a suave touch. But he seems to have felt the necessity of making the pattern in the curtain more brilliant or vibrant.

This touch of his has been called by some writers his *pointillé* manner, but it should be

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

remembered that the so-called *pointillistes* are a group of the impressionists who made pictures out of tiny specks of pure colour juxtaposed one against another. So the term *pointillist* has come to have a very definite and specific meaning rather more circumscribed than its original sense—in the same way that “impressionist” has changed.

Vermeer's round touch occurs most often, it may be, in his picture of the *Milkwoman*, which is a comparatively early one. And it is to be noted that he used it most on accessories such as fruit, bread, dishes or the tapestry curtains which he was fond of introducing into the sides of his pictures. There is a good deal of this round touch in his *View of Delft*. Here it occurs in the trees across the river and seems to be used to suggest the glittering lights on the leaves.

One wonders in looking at this particular picture whether his knowledge of optics was empirical or theoretical. At all events he seems to have divined that high lights on the trees would be round—the shape of the sun in fact. Unfortunately we have no studies of sunlight by him. It would be interesting to note whether in painting the light-made interstices of tree-

## VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE

shadows he painted them round also, for so they appear.

There are those who feel that because Vermeer is very simple, his work is not very finished or studied. Or, as others have put it, because extraneous detail is omitted he does not paint nature just as she appears. But one should put from one's mind the idea that because a man paints on a head all the freckles, the hairs, the wrinkles, he necessarily paints a head just as it appears. One may very well leave out in so doing, and many painters do so leave out, the action or movement, the general proportions, the large character, the light and shade, the right understanding of line, the larger planes of modelling. Indeed, the chief object of teaching art is to induce the simple-minded beginner to attend to these things. And more, there are those who attend to all these things, and then in a measure having gained them, begin joyously on the study of eyelids, leaving out the intermediate steps of modelling.

The ideal of painting — and a somewhat similar idea is true of sculpture — is to develop the figure from large things to small, something as a photograph is developed. Everyone has seen a

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

photographer plunge his plate into the bath of "developer" and has watched the image appear faintly and vaguely at first, lighter and more clear as each moment passes till at the exact second when things are of the right clarity the photographer snatches the plate from the bath. It is true the thing appears in negative but the principle of progression is the same.

Now the right painter does the same thing in his work. And one sees it even more plainly illustrated in sculpture. One sees a sculptor, having made his little *maquette* or model, "point up" the statue to the size he desires, building carefully his *armature* or framework, getting thoughtfully the right proportion of the head, the thorax, the iliac mass, but leaving out the slightest suggestion of the surface of things. Then one sees him fill out the outline—roughly and vaguely at first, more definitely as time goes on. The way in which a sculptor treats an eye is a good illustration of his method. In modelling in clay a man often makes the general shape of the eye socket first and then fills in the eyeball and other forms.

Many painters proceed in almost the same way, indicating the subject rather vaguely at

## VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE

first and gradually sweeping and smearing the paint about—"developing" it, as it were, till the final result is achieved. Others prefer to secure the action, structure and general outline in drawing and then put on the paint; but always the same general rule is observed of proceeding from the greater things to the less, and from them to the smallest. One might say that the greatest things should first be attended to, then the next largest, then the large things, then the rather large things, then the rather small matters, then the smaller and finally the smallest. That is, the sequence should be very carefully observed between what are very large and what are rather large, between what are rather large and what are rather small, and so on. It will be seen then that a man may secure most of the important qualities of painting and yet leave out entirely wrinkles, freckles, wens, eyelashes and many other details dear to the beginner. It is this that makes Greek art in its finest manifestations the truest art, and yet an art, to the guileless man in the street, not true at all. Something of this sort of thing may be said of Vermeer. He would achieve a miracle of design, of finish, of light and shade, and yet leave out the



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

eyelashes. It is not that he could not see them but that, having carried the pictures to the point he had, they did not seem to him particularly important. Each new tone that an artist essays endangers the success of his work, and he may have felt that having secured a certain sense of atmosphere he did not care to endanger it by a few eye-winkers.

But apart from this it is true that in treating the eye or the mouth it is necessary for the artist to keep the shapes a trifle vague in order to attain the look of mobility which these forms have. So that, doubtless, Vermeer in making forms like these consciously avoided too much definition.

One of Vermeer's qualities which we often hear about from artists is his manner of studying edges. What an artist calls an "edge" is where one form comes against another. For instance, where a head comes against the background is the "edge." But these edges constantly vary according to conditions of light, their distance from the spectator and by their own intrinsic sharpness or softness.

To take a very simple example. If we had a white cube against a grey background the edge

## VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE

of the high light would tell very sharply against the background, the edge of the half light would tell less sharply, while the edge of the shadow, being more or less the same tone as the background, would, as it were, merge into it and would show somewhat blurred against it.

If we had a like form covered with plush or some fuzzy material, all the edges would be more or less soft, but those on the shadow side would be softer and vaguer than those on the light.

From this we can get a general rule that when an edge is very different in value from the tone immediately behind it, it shows more or less sharp. When, on the other hand, the difference in tone is very slight the edge is softer.

All this seems simple enough, and yet this question of "edges" is the rock on which many painters have split. For instance, all the primitives made the edge uniformly sharp and, consequently, whatever their merits, their work looks uniformly hard. Da Vinci was, perhaps, the first man to study "edges" systematically. Many of his followers, and still more the followers of Correggio, tended to make the "edge" uniformly soft. Possibly to some extent this was the defect of Rembrandt.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

Vermeer, of all painters, seems to have taken the most pains about getting the matter right. He evidently spent no end of care in studying his edges, and yet the result is neither hard nor soft, but something a good deal like the appearance of nature. The fact is, in looking at nature — at the things in a room, for instance — one does not think of them as either hard or soft, except in so far as hardness or softness is an intrinsic quality of the thing seen. The objects simply look like themselves. We don't think about the edges — we simply take them for granted. But in looking at other pictures one constantly hears people say "too hard," or "how soft." Now the fact that one notices without conscious study that an edge is hard or soft, shows that it must be wrong. When one comes to think of it, one's impression of most of the old masters is that they are too hard or too soft. Van Eyck, Holbein, Michaelangelo one thinks of as being too hard. Correggio, Murillo and how many others one thinks of as being too soft.

This matter of edges is one to which all the Dutchmen gave great attention; and so it happens that one thinks less of their hardness or

## VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE

softness than as in the case of most other old masters. They simply look about right.

Yet when one comes to compare Vermeer with the very best of the little Dutchmen, as those Dutch painters who did small pictures are called, with Terburg and with Metzu, for instance, one perceives that with all the skill of these latter, their way of making edges was more mannered and consciously skilful than was that of Vermeer. Terburg's *Woman with the Red-haired Child* of the Louvre is a wonderfully skilful performance. Yet the way in which the edges of the child's red hair are merged into the background is more noticeable and therefore less successful than the edges in parallel cases by Vermeer.

If we study some picture by Vermeer in which he has been particularly successful technically — for instance, the *Studio* of the Czernin Gallery — we find the edges at first sight appearing quite normal, that is, we don't notice them at all. When, however, we begin to study the matter, we find that where the model's dress comes light against the equally light background the tones melt together; in the same way, where the silhouette of her back in shadow comes against the equally dark shadow the edge is quite lost.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

This seems quite simple, except that in the work of the unwary, one often finds such edges left perfectly sharp.

On the other hand, where the dark shadow of the dress comes against the light wall Vermeer deliberately lightens the tone of the wall as it comes into juxtaposition with the dress. One has only to look over the picture carefully to discover dozens of instances of this sort. At first sight it seems almost a trivial matter, and yet it is one of the things that give Vermeer his mastery of light and makes him quite distinct from most other painters.

A certain very brilliant modern painter has laid out for himself a programme of attaining what he calls the crystalline clarity of nature. When we look about a room, he maintains, things do not look cloudy or as if seen through a thick haze; they seem clearly defined in pellucid air. Certainly it would seem as if Vermeer saw things that way, for less than any of the other Dutch painters does he deign to secure atmosphere or aerial perspective by unduly softening the edges of things far back or out of focus. He puts things in place by studying these same edges



*Jan Vermeer of Delft*

CHRIST IN THE HOUSE OF MARY AND MARTHA  
COLLECTION OF W. A. COATS, SKELMORLIE CASTLE, SCOTLAND



## VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE

very carefully. The end of a map-stick against a wall, for instance, appears in one of his pictures with all the clearness that it has in real life. Yet, somehow, he achieves the sense that it is farther back than the principal parts of the composition. More than any man one can think of he has managed to express the different "values," so to say, of different edges. He has managed to make things "go back" as artists say, and yet to express his sense of their form and solidity.

This matter of crystalline clearness is more difficult than at first appears. Of course, it is easy enough to make everything defined and sharp in the room, but then the picture has the look which the simple-minded—a term which may be applied to those not expertly versed in the fine arts—call "hard." On the other hand, Rembrandt and others have softened edges indiscriminately—swept tones together till the room has a look which the layman calls "soft." This is agreeable enough, but one's mind does not react to its truth. One has a sense of a heavy smoky or misty atmosphere such as does not usually obtain in an ordinary room. It is the happy medium between these two sorts which Vermeer has set



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

out to attain; and which, in the main, he does attain. De Hooch gets something of it too; and so does Jannsens, whom the *cognoscenti* revile, but who painted well enough to make people think a certain one of his pictures was one of De Hooch's finest works. The problem is excessively difficult. One does want the distant forms and lines to take their place — to go back — and this can only be done by somewhat modifying the severity of their sharpness. At the same time it must not be too much done, or a smoky look is produced.

One sometimes hears a modern picture of an interior criticised because it is too "smooth" in *facture*. But it must be pointed out that Vermeer and, indeed, most of the Dutch painters, except Rembrandt and his pupils, painted smoothly. Even Rembrandt in his little interiors like the *Philosopher* at the Louvre painted smoothly because, forsooth, there was no other way of rendering the fine detail. It is true that Vermeer's earliest known picture the *Procuress* was painted rather heavily. But in studying the making of this picture, one arrives at the idea that this heaviness comes from the frequent repainting by

## VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE

a youth who was not wholly sure of his effect, rather than from any intentional, wilful loading of the light such as occurs in certain of Rembrandt's pictures.

As Vermeer grows more skilful his pictures grow smoother in surface, so that some of the latter ones are extremely smooth. It seems evident enough that this smoothness of Vermeer did not arise from timidity, or any liking for sleek things, but because he realised that things are evident through a curtain of air, — that they appear to us through and by the lightness or darkness, the warmth or coldness of the colour — its "saturation" or its greyness; and not in paint-strokes or granulated massings of pigment

At the same time, though Vermeer kept his surface smooth, he always managed to have it interesting and agreeable in quality. He always kept it looking as if made by a sufficiently full brush — *bien nourri*, as the French have it. Certain men — and great artists at that, like Ingres — have, in making their surface smooth, given it a mean, impoverished look. The colour looks as if put on grudgingly with a skimpy brush, whereas, in Vermeer's work, one always has the sense of a well-charged brush, however delicate

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

the work in hand may be. His draperies always look as if made by a flowing brush, though not an overcharged one. Even his little staccato touches always seem made by a sufficiently full brush though not over full. As far as one can judge it does not appear that he used much medium for these results; rather it would seem that he had a daily amount or ration, as it were, ground for him by his colour boy.

These freshly mixed tones — doubtless with a good deal of oil in them, but oil carefully mixed, not scrabbled in, by the haphazard chance of the palette — enabled him to work over and over, with a good deal of freedom and yet smoothly. And it should be said that when it seemed necessary, Vermeer was always ready to imperil his hard-won smoothness. That is, for instance, if he felt that he had made the edge of a shadow rather too sharp, instead of fuzzing the edges together, or wiping one into the other as Metzu was apt to do, he would make little staccato touches of paint — almost stippling, one might say, till the desired vagueness was attained. This required his making these touches just the right colour; and also in less skilful hands the paint might have lumped up.

## VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE

This daily mixing up of the paints or tones required was one of the real "secrets of the old masters." Instead of using colours out of a tube, colours which often have some stiff or gummy base as wax or amber to make them keep well, a master in good standing always had a paint grinder ready at hand to grind or re-grind a little colour freshly — just so much as was needful for the day. It was not always necessary to grind all the colours, but a fresh, well-ground white could be had each day. In this way the painter was able to have in his colour just the amount of medium required for the particular task in hand, and to have it well ground in and perfectly mixed. Nowadays it is often impossible for him to find a white of the consistency that he desires; he has to mess in a little medium in the colour while on the palette — and the tone, ill mixed, is harder to manage and does not keep so well.

Vermeer, as has been hinted, apparently started his pictures by laying in the light and shade very flat — without, at first, much suggestion of modelling. One gets this idea because, in some of his pictures he does not seem to have had the

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

time or he did not take the trouble to highly finish certain parts. These parts are always indicated very simply in light and shade; so that it seems reasonable to suppose that it was in this manner that he so started his work.

As far as one can judge, this was the manner in which most Dutch painters began their work. At all events, Baron Leys, who had made a deep study of the work of Pieter de Hooch, taught very much the same system to his pupils in Antwerp and gave them to understand that this was the method of the Dutch masters.

Certainly, some of Vermeer's less complete works have the air of being done by a method, some sound method, taught him by another man. It is when his pictures are carried further that one gets the true Vermeer quality—the incommunicable something which no one else could teach him. What was at the base of the Dutch school, what produced so very many painters of more than ordinary excellence, was the very thorough and thought-out training which the young artist received in the rudiments or fundamentals.

For it is worth noting that Dutch art, far from being *naïf* or guileless was, in reality, extremely

## VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE

sophisticated. The vision was *naïf*, but the means of realising it were very scientific and well thought out.

There never lived a race of men who understood more about realising the vision before them. They not only understood the fundamentals, but had every trick and subterfuge of rendering at their fingers' ends. Almost every modern cleverness was practised by them or by their neighbours the Belgians.

It is by studying Vermeer that one perceives the *rusé* character of most of his contemporaries. For instance, Metzsu had a way of wiping the edge of a half light into that of a half light somewhat darker — a harmless little subterfuge perhaps and one which looks excessively clever, yet keeps the picture from having that last touch of nature which a closer observance of just the form and colour of the half light would have given. In a parallel case Vermeer might have put a number of his round minute greyish touches along the edges of the two half lights.

Another very able painter, Gerard Terburg, permitted himself to make the lights a trifle too flat. At least, that is the impression one gets in looking over his picture of *Two Women and a*

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

*Serving Boy* at the Louvre. The heads tell almost like little wafers or plaques against the simplified background. The effect, too, is very pleasant; except that when one analyses it one perceives that it is not wholly just.

Neither Metzu nor Terburg was above a summary changing of values when it suited their book. For instance, in Metzu's fine *Woman and Money-lender* of the Boston Art Museum, one notes that the papers close to the window, which certainly ought to be the lightest thing in the picture, are "kept down" or made darker in relation to the white spots around the heads or hands. Many painters would defend this, and this is not the place to argue the matter. Only one points out that it is a sophisticated evasion, and that Vermeer, for instance, did not commit that particular sort of fault.

Vermeer's modelling is of course excellent, as has been the modelling of all great painters. But it is so elusive that it is hard to put one's finger on its peculiarities. When at its best it simply looks about right. The manner of modelling of certain other great masters is easier to trace. In Velasquez' work, for instance, one can note quite

## VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE

well the sweeping brush work with which he enveloped a head and worked from the shadow toward the high light; and also how in finishing he seems to have worked back from the high lights outward into the half lights, smearing them, as it were, into and over the already rendered half lights.

In Da Vinci's works, despite their high finish, one can get some idea of how he may have carried the light in modelling across the surface of the figure.

It may be that his drawings give us some idea of his method of attack, of his science of rendering.

But with Vermeer — especially in his masterpieces — it is very difficult to see how the thing is done. It is simply there; there is very little of brush work or obvious rendering to give one an idea of how the trick was turned. The things are there; it is part of his art to conceal its manner of making.

Still, from studying all his pictures, not only the more highly finished ones, but those that are less finished, one gets some idea of how he went to work. Evidently he had been taught by some good master to lay the thing in quite summarily



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

in light and shade. Apparently, then, when he was able to carry a thing further, he studied out the shadows pretty carefully, rendering with great exactness the differences between the accents, the reflected lights and the general shadows. Then he seems to have smeared up from the edge of the shadow into the broad light. This is at least the way the hand of the painter in the *Studio* appears to be done.

In some cases he seems to have been content to turn the edge of the shadow into light without going much further, for instance, in the *Love Letter* of the Rijks Museum where the face of the lady and the arm of the servant are done in this way. He seems always to have thought more, in a general way, about getting the object round looking than of rendering the individual planes too carefully. Note in this connection the face of the *Lady at the Virginals* in the National Gallery. In the *Pearl Necklace* of the Berlin Gallery, the modelling of the lights seems carried further and the form is more absolutely rendered. In the *Dresden Letter*, which is the same sort of picture only apparently painted at some earlier time, the modelling is carried even further, being quite intense on the head and hands.

## VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE

Perhaps the *Head of a Young Girl* in the Hague Museum is the finest piece of modelling we have by Vermeer. Here the turn from the shadow of the cheek into the light, the modulations of the mouth, — the gradation of the half light on the nose are simply wonderful — there is no other word for it. In its sense of light and shade it is one of the finest heads ever done. Yet even here, one feels it is modelled from a sense of roundness, that the sentiment for the planes of the head is not very strong.

In some of the earlier pictures like the *Milk-woman*, the modelling is much more marked, less subtle than in various of the later ones, while in the *Lace-Maker* the modelling is possibly done more by planes, especially the hands. Still this seems the exception rather than the rule.

While painting, Vermeer sat at the easel instead of standing, as most modern painters do. We should guess this from the fact that most Dutch painters did so. One does not recall a single picture of a Dutch artist standing as he painted. Doubtless Hals, Van der Helst and other painters of archers and corporation pictures did stand to their work; there was really no other

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

way to do it. But it is quite apparent that most Dutch *genre* painters sat at their work.

The way that we know Vermeer sat at his painting is curiously simple and yet quite conclusive. From the perspective of the wall and window of many of his little interiors we find that the horizon line would come a little below the shoulder of a standing figure or about at a level of the head of a seated figure — this shows that the artist himself was seated; for had he been standing the horizon line would naturally come at the height of a man standing. Of course the term horizon line is here used in its technical perspective sense, of being the imaginary horizontal line on which the vanishing point is placed.

The matter of whether an artist sits or stands at his work may seem of minor interest, but it is really quite important. Most moderns stand at their work; as we have said, many of the Dutchmen sat; and it would seem that many of the differences between modern and ancient art may be traced to this. The best modern art is apt to be strong in values — the large notes well seen and recorded but the lesser transitions often rather slighted: things are rendered strongly but



*Jan Vermeer of Delft*

LADY WITH A LUTE

COLLECTION OF MRS. HENRY E. HUNTINGDON, NEW YORK



## VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE

rather abruptly and petulantly. In Dutch art — in Vermeer for instance — the values are apparently well enough seen; but things are brought into unity by an effort of intelligence rather than by merely dabbling on the notes about right in relation one with another. The transitions and modulations of things are beautifully studied as by a man who, well planted, possessed his soul in quietude instead of walking about the studio. The rendering is suave and serene, with no apparent effort at strength for the sake of looking strong.

What particularly impresses us with things like Vermeer's maps, for instance, his lions' heads and his picture frames, is that they are rendered with infinite study and care — not by running forward and back, putting on a touch here, a touch there, till a general effect has been obtained, but by working all over the thing from one end to the other, noting every detail, each subtlest gradation, and rendering each with the utmost skill.

This is not to say that the modern way is worse or better, but that it is different. The modern way leads to the study of colour values, and it is perhaps the only way by which they can be properly studied; but on the other

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

hand, it makes the matter of rendering detail more difficult. It is true that there are certain modern masters so skilful that their works appear at a moderate distance to be highly finished; but when one looks into them, one perceives that they really are not finished at all — only suggested. That is, one perceives perfectly well just how they are done. Whereas in Vermeer's work, in many cases one has no idea how they are done, — they transcend all thought, they are just there, with no hint or trace of their making.

Another question which seems to fit in with the one just treated, is whether Vermeer painted *de premier coup*, or on an *ébauche*; that is, whether he began his painting, touch by touch, piece by piece, or whether he made a general "rub-in" as most painters do now, or made a *frotté* in transparent colour as Couture did.

One of the reasons we have for thinking that he may have, at least in some pictures, painted *de premier coup* is that in the picture of the *Studio* the artist, who has drawn in his subject in white chalk, is beginning to paint the wreath on the girl's head without having rubbed in the rest of the picture at all. As has been pointed out in

## VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE

another place, there is no reason for supposing the artist to be Vermeer himself. On the other hand, if Vermeer put up a model or a friend to be painted, he would probably have had him painting in the way in which he was himself accustomed to paint. Of course, it may have been an ironical comment on another man's way of painting: but Vermeer's whole style seems so detached — so devoid of anecdote or comment — that this seems hardly likely.

At first sight, with our modern ideas of effect, this seems a very futile and silly way of beginning a picture; but there are one or two things to be considered. In the first place a "rub-in" is not necessarily true in general effect. It is only true in so far as its maker was skilful enough to make it true. If the mysterious artist who is painting that wreath were clever enough to pitch his darkest accent and his highest light about right, his picture would turn out truer in values than a picture made by a "rubber-in" who did not get his darkest accent and his high light just right. The disadvantage of a rub-in of the general effect is that from its very rapidity one is apt to get everything more or less wrong, — it is not in humanity to get all the tones right in half



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

an hour. The trouble is that the painter is then apt to assume that his general effect is right, and, proceeding on that supposition, to produce a something that is too dingy or too dark or too brown or whatever the general defect of his rub-in may have been. One sees this particularly in landscape painting, where our painter will make a general rub-in of the large effect and wake up after several days' work to find that he has started his whole picture on too dingy or too chalky a key.

Let us suppose a specific instance. Suppose a subject of a field of red poppies in sunlight with dark trees in the middle distance and a blue sky beyond. "*A*" might rub in the general relation of the sky and the trees, putting in the poppies as best he could in relation to these two. When he comes to finish he is apt to find that by pitching the tone of his poppies right in relation to the trees he has put in too much white paint, thereby losing "saturation," and has nothing left to express their brilliancy of colour.

"*B*", on the other hand, might paint his poppies first, getting his reds as strong as possible; when he comes later to do the trees he finds that he must make them quite dark to be in relation with the red poppies; this he does. Then he

## VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE

paints his sky in relation to the other two notes and gets a painting that suggests a good deal of the brilliancy of nature. In fact, though he has not rubbed-in his picture as "A" has done, he has really thought more about the relations of tones and colours.

It may have been that Vermeer proceeded in some such way as this. He may have decided just how dark to make his dark notes, — his black picture frames, etc.; he may have decided on just how light he could make his light notes and still have them coloured; he may have indicated their "pitch" and gradually have rendered the "intermediate" notes in their relation to the lights and darks.

Usually things that are carried very far are begun piece by piece. The mere fact that the artist does not get a general effect at once, makes him more solicitous about the effect. On the other hand, when he has secured an easy general effect he is apt to rest satisfied with that, without trying to carry his picture much further in detail. One sees this in the case of Manet who painted his pictures in such a way as to be very effective but so as quite to preclude any going on or finishing.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

Vermeer's pictures owe not a little of their charm to a quality which it has become the fashion to call "architectonic;" that is, whatever may be happening in the picture in the way of incident or action, one feels always behind it these firm upright lines—column or pilaster; these quiet horizontal lines of beam or baseboard. The paintings have a "built" look, and this gives an indescribable sense of steadiness and peace to the pictures. One proof that this is so is that one feels the lack of it at once in the few pictures that are not composed in this way—in the *Courtesan*, for instance, or the *Diana*. Elsewhere it has been hinted how Vermeer made this balance of grave vertical and horizontal lines one of the elements of his composition. Whether he was conscious or not of a certain psychic effect in these calm, steady straight lines is doubtful enough; very likely he was not. But the effect remains, whether or no, and while it is an effect that other men as well have striven for—De Hooch his friend, Albert Moore, Whistler and others—one somehow associates it most with Vermeer; without doubt because he practised it most successfully.

Vermeer had one quality which he shares with

## VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE

very few artists, and that is a certain severity of line. One does not think of him primarily as a line man and, indeed, it is true that, for instance, in the detail of a hand his line sometimes falters. But he seems to have understood perfectly well the value and strength that a straight or nearly straight line may have in comparison with a curved line. In certain of his pictures, notably the Metropolitan Museum example, he pushes this simplifying of outline almost to excess. The *Pearl Necklace* of the Berlin Gallery is also an excellent example of this sort of thing. Indeed, one might almost put the maker of the Elgin marbles, Millet, and Vermeer in a class by themselves as understanding the simplifying of line in a manner that is not given to all men.

Vermeer realises in particular the value of verticals and horizontals in strengthening a composition. And he perfected, apparently by himself, a style of composition which has curious points of likeness to that of men as different from him as the Japanese on the one hand, and, as we have seen, Whistler and Albert Moore on the other. Briefly, the method of all these is to build up a definite and rather severe *mise-en-scene* of straight verticals and horizontals and then to break these

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

lines by beautifully imagined arabesques disposed in just the right places. With Vermeer these arabesques are stiffer in design — not so lovely, it may be, as those, for instance, of Albert Moore. Yet they have their own beauty even if it is of a more sober and sombre kind.

It is interesting to note that this sense of the value of severe and distinguished line does not appear at all in his earlier work. There is no sense of it in the *Courtesan*, nor yet in the *Toilette of Diana*, which, truth to say, is a rather tiresome performance, as regards design. There is no particular sense of it in the *Milkwoman*. On the other hand, the *Pearl Necklace*, the *Metropolitan Woman at the Casement*, the *Windsor Palace Music Lesson* are instinct with this sense of the value of severe line. The *Lady at the Virginals* at the National Gallery is another good instance of this fine understanding of the value of severe line. Curiously enough, in some of his best painted works this severe sense of line is not so obvious as in the ones that have been mentioned. In the *Studio* of the Czernin Collection, for instance, in the *Love Letter* of the Ryks Museum, which seems to have been painted about the same time, there is the same system of com-



*Jan Vermeer of Delft (Authenticity not fully established)*

DIANA AT HER TOILET

ROYAL PICTURE GALLERY, THE HAGUE



## VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE

position by verticals and horizontals, but it is hardly so beautiful in its working out. It seems as if Vermeer had at last become so interested in painting for its own beautiful sake that he did not care so much for the lesser graces of composition or design.

The question of Vermeer's drawing is a perplexed one to treat of, because, while he drew excellently well in one sense, he did not draw so well in another. That is, such things as still life he drew, humanly speaking, in a perfect way. There is occasionally a little faltering in the getting one side of a jug even with the other, but practically he drew still life — chairs, crumpled rugs, and his famous lion's head — perfectly well. And he often drew heads and hands well, too, in a certain sense; but that was in the still-life sense. That is, he rendered wonderfully the general shape and size of a hand, the way the light slid over it, but he was not always particularly strong on the structure. In fact, speaking frankly, he did not draw structurally at all. While many of the Dutch painters knew their anatomy passably well and made structure fairly well, it is to be questioned whether Vermeer really thoroughly



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

understood the construction of the arm, the wrist, the hand.

Sometimes by sheer keenness of perception he was able to do one quite charmingly as in the *Pearl Necklace* in the Berlin Gallery; again he rather weakens as in the arm of the *Reader* of the Ryks Museum.

It is somewhat the fashion to speak of the Dutch as impeccable draughtsmen. Fromentin says something of that sort and Mr. Kenyon Cox, himself an accomplished draughtsman, writes words to that effect. It is true that the Dutch made the general shape and proportion quite true and often got the light and shade admirably, but constructively one feels that they often faltered. Indeed, Metzu was, perhaps, the only one who drew a hand and arm with much sense of its construction, and when one compares one of his pictures with one by Bague, for instance, one perceives that the modern man knew his anatomy the better of the two.

In short, when one says they drew well, it depends on what one means by good drawing,—that is, they were strong in proportion and light and shade, but not so good in construction.

A wild scribble by Cellini or by any one of the

## VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE

*baroque* imitators of Michael Angelo has more suggestion of structure than any of the Dutch works. This is not to say that these *baroque* scribbles were good; it is merely to point out that their makers really did know something of structure. They got at the drawing of an arm or of a torso from the structural side, where the Dutch attacked it from the point of view of light and shade and of proportion.

It is to be noted that where Vermeer drew still life admirably, he was not quite so successful in treating drapery. He often, to be sure, made a wholly admirable bit; but again, as in the *New Testament* his treatment of drapery was, not to put too fine a point on it, extremely bad. This did not matter so much when he treated the stiffly quaint costumes of the day, but when he attempted a classic subject his lack of skill in managing the draperies is unedifying. This is illustrated not only in the *New Testament* but also in the *Diana and her Nymphs*, where the drapery of the chaste huntress is badly cluttered up.

Even where he was more successful in the treatment of draperies, it must be confessed that he made them at times a little blocky. His square-touch technique is more manifest in the

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

draperies than anywhere else. In some cases, notably in the *Astronomer*, the folds are made by a sort of convention, not unlike what the Van Eycks used. The directness of vision which served so well for the rendering of jugs, or even crumpled rugs, seemed for a moment to desert him in the handling of draperies. It seems as if he grew self-conscious in attacking such a difficult problem and could not work with his accustomed *sang-froid*. At all events, he does not paint across the form, as in many of his beautiful heads or bits of still life, but with the form in the manner of lesser men.

It is true that in certain of his pictures he escapes from this uneasiness. The white cap or kerchief in the *Young Woman at a Casement* of the Metropolitan Museum is very brilliantly painted, even though the *facture* be a trifle blocky. The skirt of the Brunswick *Coquette* is ably made—but this was probably arranged on a lay figure. And this supposition suggests the reason of Vermeer's difficulties. He could do drapery like a crumpled rug or a hanging curtain magnificently, because they stayed still for him; he rendered what he saw. In the same way he could do the very complicated folds of a satin skirt, if only it were



*Vermeer of Delft*

THE GIRL WITH THE WINE GLASS

PICTURE GALLERY, BRUNSWICK



## VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE

on a lay figure. But when he attempted a problem like *Diana and her Nymphs* where the draperies had to be invented or divined he was something at sea.

To make handsome classic drapery requires a special sort of study and a particular understanding of the nature and manner of the folds. This Vermeer did not have. It is nothing against him to say this. He simply showed the defect of his quality. Vermeer had a wonderful eye and a wonderful hand. Anything that would keep still for him, that he could fairly see — look at again and again and study — that thing he could render as no other man has been able to. But shifting, flowing rivers of drapery, such as run over classic forms — these things seem to have puzzled and perplexed him. One feels his renderings of them to be forms not thoroughly understood.

Vermeer's drawing of heads was usually adequate enough — in some cases quite masterly, as in the *Lace-Maker* or the *Head of a Girl* in the Hague Museum. In other cases it was hardly so good. The heads in the *Coquette* of the Brunswick Gallery are not very well made, and the girl's head in the *Music Lesson* of Mr. Frick's collection is rather disappointing.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

One notes at least three different sorts of technique. In the *Lace-Maker* and the *Woman at the Casement* the square-touch handling is quite marked. In the *Milkwoman*, while the handling of the head is not so *pointillé* as is the fruit and the bread, still the whole treatment of the thing seems more solid and "fatter" in technique. Again in one or two heads the paint seems rubbed or smeared together in a fused whole. The head of a young girl in the Arenberg Gallery is a good example of this. Any sense of square touch has disappeared from the head, although it is marked enough in the draperies. The light seems to slide across the face which appears somewhat as a half-tone print from a photograph from nature might appear. The head is rather remarkable in this respect, although it can hardly be said to be among his best works.

Gesture is a quality which in certain artists' work is supremely important. In the work of Ingres, for instance, it plays an essential part, and much of the distinction of his work springs from the original and well chosen gestures of his figures. But it must be said for Vermeer that the quality of gesture in his painting is but of

## VERMEER'S TECHNIQUE

secondary importance. It is usually adequate — it is seldom grotesque, as so often in Rembrandt; yet for a man so original in arrangement and in colour as was Vermeer, it is curious that his gesture was of so unimportant a quality. In a figure like the *Lace-Maker*, for example, the movement is perfectly adequate. It explains what the young girl is doing, yet somehow one feels that there is nothing particularly significant about it. In the work of Edgar Degas the most unimportant things sometimes take on a certain significance. So that one gazes at one of his ballet girls or washer-women and sees in her gesture a significance, an intention, as it were, more important than the mere necessity of the movement.

Perhaps one of the most significant gestures in Vermeer's work is that of the *Milkwoman*. One can imagine Jean François Millet looking on this work with approbation, and he was not easy to please, since Velasquez failed to move him. Indeed, in certain ways, it is a sort of prevision of Millet's work, only done with immensely greater technical skill — and incidentally it is much more true. The movement has something of the large dignity of Millet — though hardly his poignancy of action.



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

It would seem that the most beautiful gesture which Vermeer achieved was that of the *Pearl Necklace* of the Berlin Gallery. Here one feels more of significance in the pose—perhaps because it suggests the eternal feminine. At all events it is among the most popular of his works—and this would seem to be due to the gesture as much as anything, although the fact that the woman has a pretty face may have something to do with it. When one comes to analyse this profile, by the way, it is not really so fine or so well made as the profile of the *Reader* in the Ryks Museum.

## VALUES IN VERMEER'S PAINTING



## CHAPTER V

### VALUES IN VERMEER'S PAINTING

ONE constantly finds the term "values" in modern art criticism, and in any discussion of Vermeer the term occurs so often that it is quite necessary thoroughly to understand its meaning. It is based on our common sense of the relative values of things. For instance, one reads in an advertisement, "Good values in shirts." One shirt is worth a dollar — another two — some very glorious one is worth five.

Now let us suppose that we had two slips of paper, one slightly darker than the other, and that for some reason to be dark made the paper worth more. The value of the white slip might be one cent, of the darker one two cents.

Let us then suppose we had a cube: the value of the top, which received the high light, might be one cent; of the side, still in light, but less strongly lit, two cents. The value of the side in shadow might be three cents, and the shadow

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

cast on the table might be four cents. On looking attentively at the shadow we might perceive a reflected light lighter than the rest of the shadow yet darker than the other two sides; that might be worth two and a half cents. That would be its "value."

But we might have two cubes, one white, one grey. Then the high light on the white cube might be one cent, its half light two cents. The high light on the grey cube might be actually darker than the half light on the white cube; then its value might be three cents. It might happen that the shadow of the white cube was lighter than the half light on the grey, then its "value" would be four cents. The half light on the grey cube would be worth five cents, and its shadow six cents. That is, we pretend that as tones grow light or dark their relative value increases or diminishes, and there we have the meaning of the word "value," as used in art discussions.

It should be noted that it does not make any difference whether a tone is light or dark through the greater or less amount of light falling on it or through its actual tone or colour. Its value is determined by the amount of light or dark tone it offers to the eye. One can readily see that in



*Jan Vermeer of Delft*

A GIRL AT THE SPINET

COLLECTION OF THE LATE ALFRED BEIT, LONDON



## VALUES IN VERMEER'S PAINTING

an octagon many more "values" would be offered to the eye, and in a sphere a practically unlimited number is afforded. Yet that is a comparatively simple proposition. When we have a roomful of people to be painted the amount of "values" would mount to the millions.

Artists, however, in preparing or rubbing-in a sketch, merely try to get what they call the "big values." For instance, a landscape painter in starting a painting would try to get the relative "values" of the sky, the distance, of the trees and of the foreground, without at first much solicitude for the smaller "values" such as the high light, half light, penumbra, shadow, reflected lights, accents and translucencies of each separate individual leaf.

In indoor work an artist painting, let us say, a head, tries in his "rub-in" to get the relative values of the background, the hair in shadow, the face in shadow, the hair in light and the face in light. Later he tries to make the various lesser values.

In modern painting, however, the affair is immensely complicated by the question of what are called colour values—or colour relations. To return for a moment to our cubes. Let us sup-



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

pose that we have a yellow cube and a blue cube. Each has its set of values: high light, half light and shadow. Let us suppose that the actual tone of the blue cube is rather darker than the yellow; then the values may run something as follows: Value one, yellow high light; value two, yellow half light; value three, blue high light; value four, yellow shadow; value five, blue half light; value six, blue shadow.

If, on the other hand, the actual tone of the yellow and blue cubes is exactly as light or as dark as each other, the question is complicated. The high light of the yellow is the same "light and dark value" as that of the blue—but it is a different "colour value."

One can conceive that if one had a red, a yellow and a blue cube, not to mention a green, an orange, and a purple one, the question of colour values would be even more complicated. With octagons the matter would be worse; and when one has a roomful of articles the affair becomes tragic.

But there are even more complications. Let us suppose that our cubes are placed near a north window:—a rather bluish light from the cold blue sky falls on the objects. Let us suppose the

## VALUES IN VERMEER'S PAINTING

cubes lie on a yellowish quartered oak table — and that a bit of red drapery reflects some of its colour into the shadows.

Then the yellow cube in light would not be exactly yellow but yellow plus a greyish blue light; that is, it might be a cool yellowish grey; on the other hand, part of the shadow might partake of the warm reflection from the table and be a warm yellow, while another part would be almost orange from the reflection of the red drapery.

The blue cube, on the other hand, would be a cool blue in the light, but the shadows would look greenish in one part, purplish in another, according as they reflected from the yellow table or from the red drapery.

One can see that this complicates the question immensely. The old masters had their way of simplifying this matter which was to pay no particular attention to the reflected lights, and to paint all the shadows a uniformly rich brownish tone without regard to their local or actual colour. One sees this carried to an extreme in the work of Ribera but even so subtle a painter as Velasquez was not much preoccupied about the "colour values" of his shadows, save in his latest work.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

Certain painters like Rubens, noticed that indoor lights were apt to be cooler than the shadows—that the darker half lights were apt to come of a pearly, ashy quality, and that the shadows, particularly the reflected lights, were apt to be rather warm. Rubens reduced this to a formula as may be seen in his famous *Marie de' Medici* group of decorations in the Louvre.

Vermeer, on the other hand, had the pretension to make each tone just as it appeared. It is doubtful if he had reduced the matter to a scientific basis: it seems more probable that he merely observed the appearance of things more closely and more *naïvely* than the majority of artists who had gone before him.

It is this preoccupation with colour values which makes modern painting wholly different from antique painting. It is unfair to compare modern art with that of most of the old masters, for we of this day are trying for things which the old masters never even dreamt of. What Impressionism had to say of the greatest worth to modern artists was a word on this matter of colour values. An impressionist started his tree with green paint; then if the tree seemed too green, he put some purple and some red into his

## VALUES IN VERMEER'S PAINTING

sketch. The chief object of painting became in his work this careful study of the relative values of different spots of colour. This solicitude for values often made the impressionists pay less attention to drawing than had before been thought necessary. It is an interesting fact that most of the good *genre* painters, in this country, at least, have, at one or another time, made a deep study of the impressionistic formulæ. This study, and the knowledge proceeding from it, has given the modern painters of interiors certain qualities of colour that are never noted in the old ones — even of the Dutch school. What Impressionism did show to men was how to consider carefully the exact colour of every square inch of their canvas and its relation to every other inch. When these men came to take up indoor painting something of this colour sense — a something more exact than mere intuition for colour — remained with them. To one who knows, it is quite easy to note the difference in colour between the work of a man who has at one or another time worked impressionistically and that of one who has not. The work of the former is apt to be more beautiful in greys; that of the latter almost always has a brownish colour, which is

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

the 'sign manual of insensitiveness to subtle colouration.

What the moderns have not as yet achieved is the high finish which the older painters did get. One can readily see that, when a painter is thinking all the time of how one spot compares in colour with half a hundred other spots, he is less likely to force himself to carry or finish each bit as far as he might. Every added value increases the difficulty, and he is too apt to rest satisfied with a general effect and not strive to carry it much further.

Certain modern painters have, or pretend to have, carried this study of values to tremendous lengths. A well known Franco-American painter used to tell of having counted a hundred and fifty values for a picture he was painting. Practically, however, most painters do not pursue this method. They proceed more as a sculptor might who would make the large planes of his head, and later, when all was established, elaborate the smaller planes and gradations. So, too, the painter in making a head, usually first establishes the general plan of light and shade, and later puts in the larger planes, and last the smaller planes and gradations. As far as we can judge

## VALUES IN VERMEER'S PAINTING

by studying his work, this is very much the plan on which Vermeer proceeded.

It should be clearly understood that this comprehension of the relation of things or values was one of Vermeer's greatest qualities — one of the things that go to make his work unique. Other men have been celebrated for their "values," for their sense of the relation of things; but it seems as if in Vermeer this sense was more acute, not only in "light and dark values," but in "colour values."

No man ever understood light and shade more thoroughly or made it better than did Vermeer. And one cannot study his work long without feeling that this same light and shade was one of the most subtle qualities in his work. One often hears his interiors praised for their "atmosphere," but practically speaking there is no atmosphere in an interior. That is, the difference between the foreground and the background is so slight that the intervening atmosphere does not modify the distance at all as it often does in landscape. What the unwary call "atmosphere" in an interior is really light and shade — assuming that that includes the study of edges. And, indeed, light and

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

shade is not so good a name as was the old Italian term of *chiaroscuro*, so scoffed at by the unregenerate. The French translate the term into *clair-obscur*, and that puts it very well. It is the study of what parts appear clearly and what parts are more or less obscure. One might comment on this, "Why study what must be perfectly obvious?" But that is the curious thing about it. Before we begin to study drawing and painting our eye is trained to pierce obscurities, to try to find out what is within, so that practically the layman sees as much in a shadow as in a light. In fact, until we are trained in drawing we see not the shadow but what is in the shadow. One of the things for a student to learn is to note the comparative obscurity of things in shadow compared to those in light.

Vermeer, then, noted, in a remarkable way, this comparative obscurity of the shadows in relation to the lights. And he did not make them too obscure as did Ribera, for instance, but of just the obscurity they had in nature and no more. This may seem simple enough, but it is really one of the most difficult things in painting. One way of observing its difficulties is to note the pitfalls into which the various great exponents of *chiaro-*

## VALUES IN VERMEER'S PAINTING

*scuro* have fallen. Ribera, as we have seen, and Caravaggio as well, made the shadows too obscure and too black. Rembrandt, who had a much better sense of the illumination of shadows by reflected light, possibly made them too warm; possibly, also, he sometimes exaggerated the reflected lights. He did not always make the proper colouristic difference between the light and the shadow. Velasquez, in many ways a master of light and shade, made, it would seem, the shadows of too uniformly brown a nature — except in one or two wonderful pictures like *Las Meninas*.

Again, in the matter of the edge of the shadow against the light, Ribera made the edge too sharp or of too ropy a picturesqueness. Correggio, one would say, often made it too soft.

It is not in humanity to be perfect, but it would seem that Vermeer made light and shade better than did any of these others. His colour does not always seem absolutely right, but that may be laid down to colour changes; because in those of his pictures which have "kept," the colour of the shadows is quite beautiful. But his light and shade seems practically perfect.

He had a fine sense of the proper amount of



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

softness or sharpness for the shadow, although it would seem that he was in the habit of laying in the shadows of his draperies rather sharp of edge. In various of his pictures he has overcome this; in others, it appears that for one reason or another he had not had time to finish them completely.

It is in his still life that he is most successful, and it must be admitted that, with certain beautiful exceptions, Vermeer painted flesh in something the same spirit that <sup>1</sup> painted still life. The light and shade is always handsome; sometimes the construction is hardly so good. But in still life he is always wonderful. One does not, off hand, recall a single instance where he has failed in still life. No one has ever painted the graduated light on a wall better than he. It may be that some of the moderns have noted the shifting colours more acutely, but they would be the first to acknowledge that he was their master and had indicated the way to be followed.

Many of the things in Vermeer's work which the uninitiate does not notice are really the most astonishing of all. Let us take, as an instance, the way he would paint a map. A map in those days was a much more important thing than now.

## VALUES IN VERMEER'S PAINTING

It was very expensive. The plates were made by hand and printed by hand; and they were illustrated with interesting designs and comments,—“Here is much gold,” “Here be antres vast—and anthrophagi.” A map was a serious thing, beautifully made, very expensive, and its possession was a matter of pride. It was used as a decoration—just like a picture. Or, at all events, Vermeer perceived its decorative value and so used it in his pictures, as did many other Dutch artists.

To Vermeer a map was not a thing to be scamped but to be lovingly studied in its every detail. And yet the problem was to make it “lie flat,” to “keep back,” not to be “too busy.” Well, somehow Vermeer accomplished all this—he managed to indicate every scrap of detail and yet to give the sense of shifting light on it as if it were merely a flat part of a flat wall.

It is impossible for any one who has not painted to realise the difficulty of this. Most artists usually either put in all the detail and fail more or less ingloriously in presenting the flatness of the wall and making the map keep its place; or, more commonly, they deliberately leave out most of the detail, or blur it by a conventional trick.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

Vermeer did neither of these things; he simply quietly made it just the way it looked — and just the way it looked, too, at so many feet behind the principal figure. There is only one possible way of doing this, and that is by the proper study and correct rendering of values, of edges and of *chiaroscuro*.

Almost all the critics who write about Vermeer — even so intelligent a man as Dr. Hofstede de Groot — speak of many of his pictures being in sunlight.

Dr. de Groot, speaking of De Hooch in comparison to Vermeer, says, "Both men showed a common preference for effects of strong sunlight," etc. It is true enough that De Hooch often painted sunlight in his pictures, but so far as one knows, except in the *View of Delft*, Vermeer never got it into his pictures. His paintings, to be sure, are irradiated with light, but it is most often the cool light that comes from a north window. This is easy enough to prove, for sunlight on a figure makes sharp edges and strong reflected lights. None of Vermeer's pictures have either of these characteristics.

The only picture that could possibly give colour

**JAN VERMEER OF DELFT**  
**THE LOVE LETTER**  
**Rijks Museum, AMSTERDAM**





\_\_\_\_\_



## VALUES IN VERMEER'S PAINTING

to this theory is the *Love Letter* of the Rijks Museum, where the cast shadows of the pictures on the wall are so sharp and strong as to suggest sunlight. Even here, however, one feels doubtful about the matter, for the figures and faces of the lady and of the maid servant are not modified by reflected light, as they certainly would have been in sunlight.

Besides, sunlight coming into a room makes a decided area or splash of light in one place. The other parts of the room are, in relation, considerably darker — they are also irradiated, but by reflected lights or by the light from the sky, not directly by the sun itself. This is well illustrated in Jannsen's *Lady at her Writing-table* at the Städelsches Institut, Frankfurt, where a mass of sunlight shows itself quite different from the rest of the room.

One does not, at present, recall any picture by Vermeer in which this phenomenon of light occurs.

The light is of the same nature throughout, whereas in a sunlit room there are two distinct kinds of direct light — that from the sun itself and that from the sky. Indeed, it may be said that one of the interesting differences between



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

De Hooch and Vermeer is that the latter always deals with one direct light, with its gradations and attenuations, while De Hooch delights in the cross lights given by several windows—and the different quality of the sunlight with its strong reflections and the lesser direct lights given by the sky from other windows.

## COMPOSITION AND DESIGN



## CHAPTER VI

### COMPOSITION AND DESIGN

VERMEER'S method of arrangement is to an artist one of his most personal and peculiarly characteristic qualities. This personal method of arrangement is not so marked in his earlier works as it is in certain of his later ones. Moreover, it is not so apparent in his outdoor work as it is in his interiors.

The design — the pattern, so to say — of certain of Vermeer's works is very beautiful. And this is the more remarkable because this quality does not appear in the works of most of the Dutch painters. Their works are often admirably composed, as will appear to any reader of old Burnet's excellent book about composition. And they are composed, too, in that most difficult and elusive of ways where the composition is not particularly obvious. But most of the able Dutch painters do not seem to have preoccupied themselves at all on this question of pattern. One

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

feels that Vermeer's friend, Fabritius, did, and this fact is one of the reasons for thinking that Fabritius may have influenced Vermeer. But Fabritius' whole method of design is so very different from that of Vermeer that one cannot help feeling that the latter may have got his inspiration from some other oracle.

Many people use the terms composition and design as if they were interchangeable; but in reality they are quite different. Composition, one would say, is a composing or a pushing about of the different parts of a picture — of the main interest — of secondary and tertiary interests in such a way that the picture explains itself.

Design, on the other hand, is the arranging or studying out of an agreeable or significant pattern for the picture. It includes the designing or setting forth the dark masses so that they will balance agreeably with the light masses, and *vice versa*, of course, with the light masses. In commercial designing, the workmen make great case of having the dark masses of the design fit in properly with the lighter masses; and this is of the same importance in picture design.

Vermeer managed both these things excellently



*Jan Vermeer of Delft*

---

THE CONCERT

COLLECTION OF MRS. JOHN L. GARDNER, BOSTON



## COMPOSITION AND DESIGN

well; only, as his subjects were usually of the simplest nature, the question of composition was not a peculiarly intricate one. Whatever story there was to tell was apt to be of the shortest and simplest nature; the intrigue required no elaborate working out. His composition would seem to have been always adequate, but not particularly intricate.

On the other hand, his design is often very studied, often very original, and in his best examples, quite beautiful. Off hand one would speak of the *Music Lesson* of the Windsor Castle, the *Lady at the Virginals* of the National Gallery, the *Pearl Necklace* of the Berlin Gallery.

Good in design, too, are the *Woman at the Casement* of the Metropolitan Museum, the *Reader* of the Amsterdam Gallery and the other *Reader*, of the Dresden Gallery.

These are among the pictures of his which one thinks of as remarkable in design. On the other hand, some of his best painted works do not seem particularly remarkable in this respect. For instance, the *Studio* of the Czernin Gallery, though it is handsomely trimmed, so to say, with the curtain on one side and the candelabra, does not



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

seem to be conceived for the sake of the design — as the *Pearl Necklace* does, for instance, or the *Lady at the Virginals*. This *Studio*, more than any of his works, seems to have been painted for the sheer pleasure of painting, without any particular preoccupation about design, story or any other outside matter.

Vermeer's design and his composition as well are so personal and so different from that of others that it seems strange that his work should have been so often mistaken for that of other men — Terburg, De Hooch and Metzu. These three have certain points of resemblance, and yet, when one studies their varying methods of composition, one perceives vast differences between the men.

Terburg, as a rule, seems to have left the background merely as a foil for the figure. He was primarily a figure painter — first, last and always. He desired the figures to be the important things in his composition. His background, then, was something to be kept out of the way, to be effaced as much as possible, and so he has effaced them, often with the most remarkable skill. One feels always with these wonderful little figures that they are the whole thing; that the back-

## COMPOSITION AND DESIGN

ground is quite completely secondary, beautiful as it may be in its very manner of staying back. It would seem, one would guess, that in making a composition he arranged his little mannikins in an agreeable way and then bethought himself of some fitting background. When one thinks of some of his finest compositions—the *Soldier and Woman* of the Louvre, the *Parental Admonition* and others—one perceives that one remembers the figures quite distinctly, but has a comparatively dim idea of the background.

It is quite different with De Hooch. With him the *mise-en-scene* is everything. Evidently a picture presented itself to his mind as an arrangement of beautiful lines and *chiaroscuro*, which represented some interior. The figures are apparently afterthoughts.

Indeed, in some cases, as in a picture in the National Gallery, one can see the lines of the background showing through the principal figure. De Hooch did not do the figure well,—he was much the weakest in this respect of the great quartet of Terburg, Metzu, Vermeer and himself. At his best, he is a marvel in the treatment of interiors, but the moment he begins to paint a figure he seems embarrassed and clumsy. There-

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

fore one calls him a painter of interiors *par excellence*.

With Vermeer one feels the figure and the stage setting as of equal importance. Neither could exist without the other. That is, one feels that both are integral parts of the composition. From the point of view of design, a map or a picture in a painting by Vermeer is often as important as a head or a figure. This is not so with Terburg, where the figures would look quite well composed with merely the canvas behind; or with De Hooch, where the interior would be charming without any figures in front.

This basic difference in composition would seem to have arisen from Terburg's making his arrangements in his head, as it were, without the model. His way is the way such a scheme would work out. Then with nature before him he rendered the thing objectively.

De Hooch's method suggests his having painted his interior quite carefully and lovingly and then having introduced his figures at the essential point to give what some art writers call "human interest."

Vermeer's compositions seem to have been made on the spot, — one fancies him pushing the

## COMPOSITION AND DESIGN

model about or perhaps merely observing her till the scheme of things took on an interesting shape. Naturally, when there were two or three figures, this way of arrangement became more difficult, and just as naturally these compositions are seldom as personal as are his one-figure effects.

Another point of difference is that Vermeer often has his principal figure cut off halfway down. This hardly ever occurs with Terburg or with De Hooch. With Terburg the figures composed a little comedy. It was essential that they should all be there. With De Hooch it was equally important that there should be the sense of the room about the whole figure. Vermeer, on the other hand, cut off his figure wherever the design happened to demand it.

With all these examples it happens at times in specific instances that the work of these men comes very nearly together. For instance, there is a De Hooch in the Wallace Collection, which, at one time, Bürger-Thoré thought to be a Vermeer. The famous lion-headed chair appears in it; the character of the interior is much like certain of Vermeer's. What leads us to believe that the picture is by De Hooch is, that the figures are painted with a clumsiness that does not at all

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

suggest Vermeer. Also the colour seems different.

Again, there is a picture by Terburg — and one of his most delightful ones — the *Concert* of the Berlin Gallery, which is so like Vermeer in its method of composition that it is difficult to believe it is not by the Delft master. When, however, one begins to examine the details — as the woman's head, her sleeve, or her satin dress — one perceives at once that the technique is quite different from that of the master of Delft.

Comparison with Metzu is not so instructive, because the latter's method of composition is not so invariable as that of these other two. One feels that he changed his composition constantly; that he was a searcher, or, it may be, an imitator. His *Sick Child*, lately bought from the Steengracht Collection by M. Kleinberger, suggests Vermeer.

One can hardly compare Vermeer's composition with that of Rembrandt, because the point of attack of the two men was so very different. Rembrandt, one would say, composed always by the *chiaroscuro*. One does not feel in his work any particular sense of pattern; indeed, the idea of pattern never seems to have occurred to him. Again, Rembrandt is one of the most dramatic of



*Gabriel Metz*

THE SICK CHILD  
IN THE POSSESSION OF F. KLEINBERGER, PARIS



## COMPOSITION AND DESIGN

painters. Even his most quiet paintings, like the two little *Philosophers* in the Louvre or the *Supper at Emmaus*, are *au fond* intensely dramatic.

With Vermeer it is quite the other way. He is not dramatic at all. Indeed, it would be hard in the whole range of painting to find a painter less dramatic than he. His composition, when it is successful, is always so from the æsthetic standpoint, never from the dramatic.

It is really rather curious that Rembrandt should have been selected by certain of the undiscerning as a master for Vermeer. Because the men differ so markedly in point of view, *facture* or handling, in colour and in quality, that one gets to think of them as very different men.

We have spoken of point of view already, but, in the matter of handling, the difference between the two men is very marked. Rembrandt, as we all know, was apt to make things very *impasto*. Vermeer, on the other hand, was particularly remarkable in this respect, that he was able to paint smoother than most men, and yet able to leave his work in an artistic state. Moreover, while the work of many masters grows more rough as they progress, Vermeer was able, especially in his later pictures, to keep his surface



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

smooth to the end. It is suggested by some that as Rembrandt was a master of light and as *chiaroscuro* was also a distinguishing quality of Vermeer, the latter must have been a pupil of the former. But it should be remembered that Rembrandt did not invent light and shade. Correggio had done the thing supremely well a hundred years earlier. For a hundred years, then, light and shade, or *chiaroscuro*, had been one of the chiefest preoccupation of painters. The whole Dutch school was based on light and shade. Rembrandt merely ran it into the ground, as it were.

With Vermeer this is not so. Light and shade appealed to him only because it helped him to give the aspect of nature. Where Rembrandt drenched his pictures with his Jekyll and Hyde nostrum of light and shade — one in a white paper, one in a blue — Vermeer merely remembered that light was clear — that shade was obscure.

What seems rather curious about Vermeer is that while certain of his pictures, as we have pointed out, appear extraordinarily well designed, others do not seem particularly remarkable in this respect. Nothing, it would seem, could be handsomer in design than the *Pearl Necklace*

## COMPOSITION AND DESIGN

of the Berlin Gallery, or the *Lesson in Music* of the Windsor Gallery. Yet on the other hand the *Courtesan* and the *Diana and her Nymphs* seem rather uninspired. The composition of the *Courtesan* is more skilful than at first it seems to be; yet one would hardly think of it as a masterpiece of design, which certainly is what must be said of others of Vermeer's pictures. Apparently at the beginning of his career he was trying so hard to learn how to render nature that he was not greatly interested in arrangement. Later we come to his period of beautiful arrangement; and curiously enough, at the last in the *Studio* we seem in certain respects to come back to his beginning — with a difference; that is, he now seems so delighted in the mere joy of rendering things supremely well that again his interest in arrangement *per se* seems to wane. We begin to find he is a man of markedly different sides. It is not often that a very great composer is mingled with a great executant. This is so with Vermeer, but at times one side seems to come uppermost, at times another.

There are in Vermeer's work certain strong points of resemblance to the Japanese, and yet

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

there are differences as well. The Japanese, it would seem, generally base their composition on some diagonal line, and very skilfully contrive to modify it by opposed diagonals and by beautiful arabesques thrown against it. Vermeer's design, on the other hand, as we have seen, is based on a system of uprights and verticals. Moreover, Vermeer's compositions always included the element of light and shade which, as we all know, the Japanese ignore. It is this interest in light and shade on the one hand, and the ignoring of it on the other, which makes one of the chief differences between occidental and oriental art.

Still, with all its differences, Vermeer's art does indubitably to some extent suggest Japanese art. Both are particularly based on the *désaxé* system of arrangement. And in both one feels that the question of design or of pattern is a primary motif instead of merely being a sort of by-product.

Vermeer's likeness to Whistler, or Whistler's to him, is another matter. It is not suggested for a moment that Whistler was in any way influenced by the other; indeed, it is a question if Whistler

## COMPOSITION AND DESIGN

was ever very much interested in the Dutchman's work. Still, there are several curious points of resemblance in arrangement and in composition. In the first place, there is the method, already noted, of helping out the composition by pictures skilfully placed on the wall in such a way as to develop the main lines of the composition. But apart from all this, something in the mental attitude of the two men is much alike. Not that Vermeer was so *super-raffiné* or so self-conscious as Whistler. But in a rather unconscious way he seems to have loved long simple lines, and large undisturbed surfaces. One has a sense in the work of both of them that there were certain things they liked very much, and other things they liked not at all. There is always a sense of preferences, of sacrifices, of reticences.

It is true that in Whistler's work, except, perhaps, in one or two of his very best, one feels a dandified spirit; while Vermeer's, in spite of its supreme distinction, is more homely and unconscious. Still, it is undeniable that both men are very distinguished; the one nervous, self-conscious, *super-raffiné* — "dying of a rose," indeed, "in aromatic pain," the other calm, almost phlegmatic, quite unconscious, and without pose — re-

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

fined through instinct rather than from surroundings — liking whatsoever things are pure from a sort of intellectual sanity — yet both of them not the less wholly distinguished — quite apart from the ordinary.

Delft was the centre of the Delft ware industry, and the famous blue and white Delft pottery was avowedly based on the Chinese and Japanese blue and white porcelain.

Many oriental vases were imported, and it was from the study of the willow-pattern, of the hawthorn vases and various other more or less well-known Chinese designs that Delft ware was developed. It seems almost certain that in so small a place as Delft, Vermeer knew the potteries; doubtless, being interested in things artistic, he had friends among the potters. It may have been that there or somewhere else he saw certain Japanese designs that gave him or suggested to him his method of balancing or completing his design with certain pictures on the wall.

At all events, we know that Vermeer knew and loved oriental art, from the Chinese or Japanese vases which appear in certain of his works. We know that the tremendous interest in Japanese



*Jan Vermeer of Delft*

## A GIRL ASLEEP

COLLECTION OF THE LATE B. ALTMAN



## COMPOSITION AND DESIGN

art, which so moved the artists of Paris in the sixties and which as much as anything else had its part in the development of Impressionism and of modern composition — that this interest had its rise from certain books of Japanese prints which Bracquemond found in packing boxes which had been used for Japanese vases. It seems at least possible then that Vermeer may have seen Japanese prints or books of prints left in some packing box, and that the Japanese method of composition may have to some extent modified his own.

At all events, Vermeer's style is singularly suggestive of the Japanese. One notices it in a roundabout way through his resemblance to Whistler; that is, as a jesting artist once said, Vermeer seemed to imitate Whistler a good deal. We know that Whistler got his peculiar method of arrangement through study of the Japanese, and it would seem not impossible to suppose that Vermeer might have attained his somewhat similar manner through study of the same sources.

The Japanese make great case of a quality which they call *Notan*. This means the proper distribution and balance in size and shape of the



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

light masses and the dark masses. With this thought in one's mind, one cannot study one of their fine prints a moment without perceiving how definitely and conclusively this idea is worked out. There are those who say that no great composition was ever made which did not have this proper balance between light masses and dark masses. Whether this is true or not, it is certain that in Vermeer's best things this quality of *Notan*, or balance of light masses with dark masses, was very strongly developed. In looking at one of his pictures, one is struck at once with the balance, shape and rhythm of his dark masses as opposed to the light masses. And he often does this precisely in the Japanese way. It is one of the things which makes one wonder if he may not have seen some Japanese prints. That is, his dark mass is a mass which in itself is dark, his light mass is one which in itself is light. He does not rely on dark shadows, as did Rembrandt, or sometimes Tintoretto, to pull him out of a difficulty by indicating a dark space here or there. Although he understood *chiaroscuro* thoroughly, as a matter of composition his pictures would have looked just as well if they had been printed in flat local tones like a Japanese print.

## COMPOSITION AND DESIGN

This quality of *Notan* is much stronger in his later middle period than in his early period. And this is one of the things which makes one feel as if some outside influence must have affected him. For the *Courtesan*, though a good composition, especially in colour, has little of the design which we feel to be particularly characteristic of Vermeer. *The Toilet of Diana* looks a good deal like the same sort of composition men about him were making. So does the *Mary and Martha*, which, as far as design goes, is rather stupid. The *Milkwoman*, despite its biblical, Millet-like simplicity, is not unique as an arrangement.

But pictures like the *Pearl Necklace* of the Berlin Gallery, or the *Lady at the Virginals* of the National Gallery, are like nothing else of their time as far as design goes. Nothing like them was done in occidental art until Whistler's day. And the fact that Whistler got his inspiration from Japanese art makes one wonder if Vermeer, too, may not have seen a print or two. In the *Pearl Necklace*, the shapes and light and dark masses are balanced in just the same spirit as they would be in a Japanese print. Of course there are great differences; one is of the Occi-

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

dent, the other of the Orient; but there is in both this sense of *Notan*, this balance of the light and dark masses.

The pictures that strike us particularly in this way are the *Pearl Necklace*, the *Young Lady at the Virginals*, the *Music Lesson* of Windsor Castle, and, to a lesser degree, the *Woman at the Case-ment* and the *Lute Player*. In these there is a balance of design and understanding of the proper relations of light and dark masses that is unique in Dutch art.

Another thing that makes Vermeer's composition so very different from the rest of the Dutchmen was his way of putting into a picture precisely the elements that were needed and leaving out everything else. This again suggests the study of Japanese prints. In Vermeer's best compositions, like the *Pearl Necklace*, or the Windsor Castle picture, there does not seem to be a single element which could well be left out. This is not so with many of the Dutchmen. Jan Steens' canvases pullulate cats, dogs, bird-cages, beer-mugs and people. Metzu, in his best moments very simple, as in the *Sick Child*, often forgot himself and introduced trivial accessories, as in his market scenes. Terburg had much of

## COMPOSITION AND DESIGN

Vermeer's restraint, but then his little canvases are often scenes at the theatre rather than pictorial compositions.

Even in Vermeer's earliest compositions this principle appears. In the *Courtesan* the picture seems a little crowded, but when one looks it over, one sees that every element is necessary to the composition — particularly the colour composition — and could not well be left out. Even a rather stupid composition like the *Mary and Martha* is simple enough in its elements. But as he goes on this simplicity of arrangement grows even more marked. This is one of the many things that make him seem so modern to us. For we, like him, have come to feel that a picture should not be frittered up with extraneous accessories, but should have its main elements as simply stated as is possible.

One of the characteristics of this design of his — which also is of course characteristic from their very nature, of Japanese prints — is that he designed in dark against light. When one stops to think of it, most of the other Dutch painters did it the other way about, — they employed a dark background as a sort of foil to a light figure. Fabritius is almost the only one of them, except

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

Vermeer, who habitually arranged dark against light. Indeed, this is one of the things which leads one to think Fabritius influenced Vermeer.

One or two of Metzu's are arranged in this way, but comparatively few.

In Vermeer's work this is very marked. One thinks of the *Pearl Necklace*, the *Reader* of the Ryjks Museum, the *Woman at the Casement* and various others.

Even where Vermeer did not arrange his figures to loom up dark against the background, he crowded dark masses in the foreground in such a way as to make a dark silhouette against the more luminous middle distance.

Vermeer not only, in his good moments, understood the balance of light and dark masses, but he also had a new and very original way of treating colour composition. For instance, in the *Pearl Necklace* the yellowish jacket is balanced by a yellowish curtain in the extreme upper left corner. All through his work one sees this system of balances or *rappels* of colour. Sometimes it is more marked than at others, but always he manages to make one blue balance another, and if there is a yellow note in one part, there will

## COMPOSITION AND DESIGN

usually be a touch of yellow somewhere else to recall it.

Another instance of this system of colour balance is seen in the *Lace-Maker*. The yellow waist is balanced by the dull buff of a pigskin book and by certain yellow leaves in the pattern on the tablecloth. Again, the light blue of the lace pillow is balanced by the darker blue of the cushion at the side and by the dull blue of the table. As in the *Pearl Necklace*, one single small sharp note of red is introduced to key up the picture.

In the *Woman at the Casement* the buff colour of the bodice is balanced by the brass water jug and by a jewel case covered with yellow. The dark blue skirt has a *rappel* in a light blue drapery thrown across a chair.

Art critics are always speaking of a painter's affecting certain colours. One hears of a Nattier blue, a Gainsborough blue, the kind of black Manet painted; and one hears a good deal of Vermeer's special colours. Havard and Bürger speak of his lemon yellow, his blue, his bronze green, and his geranium red. Doubtless he had certain objects of one or another particular colour which he liked to paint. Only of course they

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

were not always the same colour; they varied in colour just according as the light fell on them. So that one cannot say that he had a particular yellow, a particular green, since they varied according to the circumstance of light.

Still it is evident that he did like certain colours better than others. In arranging his colour harmonies he selected certain objects of certain colours, arranged them before him as seemed right and then, apparently, painted them just as they appeared.

His whole sentiment and arrangement of colour is different from that of any other man we know about. His compositions are often based on the colour blue — a colour which most composers have considered dangerous to handle. It would seem that Vermeer, living in Delft and doubtless seeing much of the potteries (there is a tradition that he occasionally filled a lost hour by painting there himself), possibly acquired a knowledge, a sense of the possibilities of blue in relation to white as a decorative colour. One notes that many of his pictures are built up on this plan — a dull greyish-white wall with blue oppositions.

But Vermeer went further than merely making colour symphonies after the manner of Whistler.



*Jan Vermeer of Delft*

## THE LOVE LETTER

COLLECTION OF THE LATE ALFRED BEIT, LONDON





## COMPOSITION AND DESIGN

He felt the need of a cutting colour, a complementary, in his colour harmonies. With that strange intuition which he often showed about things, he seems to have realised that yellow, not orange, was the complement of the kind of blue he used. Certain modern investigations into the laws of colour have affirmed the same thing. For instance, the Schistoscope of Brücke gives yellow as the complementary of lapis-lazuli.

Given then blue, yellow, grey, white and black, Vermeer already had a good deal to make a beginning with, and his compositions are very often based on these colours or tones. This is the basis of the *Pearl Necklace*, of the *Woman at the Casement*, of the *Lace-Maker* and many others.

Of course, a picture composed with only these elements of colour might look rather bare, and probably that is the criticism many people make to themselves on Vermeer's colour composition. Vermeer himself was apparently aware of it and had his own ways of obviating this bareness. In the *Pearl Necklace*, for instance, he discreetly introduces a chair behind the table, which is of a dull greenish hue with blue and yellow touches; and there is a little knot of red ribbon in the

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

girl's hair, which gives tone to the whole colour composition.

Again, as we have often seen, he frequently uses a crumpled rug of red, with touches of yellow, blue, white and black, which, to use the old country phrase, "cuts the grease" of the almost too suave colour symphony. This rug, however, is almost always placed for the most part in shadow, so that the red tones are not dominant.

There are certain compositions in which the blue and yellow combination does not obtain. The *Coquette* is built round the rose-coloured note of the young lady's bodice and skirt. The *Dresden Reader* is all composed in green; that is, green is the dominant note of the composition. But one would say that the blue and yellow note is by far the most common in his colour compositions. Sometimes he does not take the trouble to introduce any other positive colours to vary the effect. The *Young Girl's Head* in the Hague is just in blue and yellow. And the *Reader* of the Ryjks Museum is almost entirely in blue, dull yellow, grey and black.

It is curious to find as ultra-modern a type as Vincent van Gogh, the Post-Impressionist, speaking of this picture with approval. He says in a

## COMPOSITION AND DESIGN

letter: "Do you know of a painter called Jan Van der Meer? He painted a very distinguished and beautiful Dutch woman in pregnancy. The scale of colours of this strange artist consists of blue, lemon yellow, pearl grey, black and white. It is true in the few pictures he painted the whole range of his palette is to be found: but it is just as characteristic of him to place lemon yellow, a dull blue and light grey together as it is of Velasquez to harmonise black, white, grey and pink."

This use of lemon yellow by Vermeer is all the more interesting because certain modern theorists in colour combination have asserted that a clear, saturated, light yellow cannot successfully be used in a colour composition. The only answer to this is that it is successfully used in many compositions. Not only in Vermeer do we find this clear yellow, but, employed in a different way, we find it in Terburg and in some of Murillo's works.

Vermeer is one of the very few painters who seem to have composed a picture colouristically; that is, like a bouquet of flowers, or as one trims a hat. Most of the Dutch figure compositions impress us as rather grim and grey in tone with

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

masses of colour put in here and there to liven the whole. Sometimes these colours seem happily chosen; more often, perhaps, they are not. Many colour compositions look to one as if the colours were assembled at random because the painter could not think of anything else to put there. Often, as we have said, compositions are made mostly in black, with mere touches here and there of colour to brighten the whole. With Vermeer black is almost always used only as an accent to give tone, rather than as a mass by itself.

One thinks in this connection of three ways of composing by colour: that of the Venetians, that of Vermeer and that of Whistler. Some of Whistler's arrangements in colour are quite handsome, but one feels that he only trifled with a few colours at a time. His titles read "Arrangement in blue and gold," "Arrangement in Purple and Rose," "Nocturne — Opal and Silver." Some of these are quite beautiful, but one feels that he perhaps avoided a few of the more difficult problems in colour composition.

The Venetians, on the other hand, composed with a full bouquet of colour; they almost always managed to get all the important colours into their pictures: a rich crimson red, a cool yellow,

## COMPOSITION AND DESIGN

a peacock blue, a warm bronzed green, a rusty orange and even a purple of sorts, not to speak of plenty of white, and a little black were there. And they managed, somehow, to harmonise all these colours, — perhaps because they were not always above modifying the tones to suit their book. They were apt to proceed in a certain way; that is, they often got plenty of flesh colour with white about it. Then, near by, would come yellow and perhaps pink, red and orange a little farther out and, on the outskirts, greens, blues and purples. A very good example of this sort of thing is to be seen in the *Entombment* of Titian; and this is the kind of arrangement which Sir Joshua Reynolds had in mind when he said that blue could not well be put in the middle of a picture.

Of course, it can be if the man who does it knows his business well enough. Vermeer does it constantly with considerable success. In the *Reader* of the Rijks Museum the young woman's dressing jacket, which is certainly the colouristic center of the composition, is a pale blue. Yet this arrangement, though rather unexpected, is quite beautiful colouristically. So is the *Woman at the Casement* of the Metropolitan, which is a

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

blue note of colour; so are several others which one could mention. Merely, Vermeer had a different conception of colour composition from the Venetians. One would not say it was better, but it was different and it was good. In at least one of his compositions, the *Courtesan*, he achieved a full chord of colour with most of the important colours present and made a beautiful arrangement that was yet quite different from the Venetian idea of colour combination.

Indeed, this is one of the most remarkable colour combinations to be seen anywhere, both from its originality and from its complete success. And one of the interesting things about it is that the tones are quite true. There is no keying up of one colour, no muting another to keep the colour scheme. Apparently he made his arrangement and then painted it as much as possible as it appeared. That indeed, is one of the things which make most so-called colourists different from him; they are always painting some colour note as it does not appear, in the hope that it will "go" better with the general colour scheme. He apparently made his colour arrangement in nature as well as might be, and then painted it just as it appeared.

**JAN VERMEER OF DELFT**  
**A MAID-SERVANT POURING OUT MILK,**  
**OR THE MILK-WOMAN**  
**RIJKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM**









## COMPOSITION AND DESIGN

We have seen, then, that in many ways his composition was different from that of the men about him. His way of placing a figure on the canvas, his manner of balancing the light and dark masses of his picture, and last, his feeling for arrangement in colour were quite unique, and after his own fashion.



## OLD MASTERS



## CHAPTER VII

### OLD MASTERS

IN certain respects Vermeer's work was very much of his own time. Probably he himself was not conscious that it was in any way markedly different. He painted the same sort of subject as everyone else, although, as we have pointed out, he handled it in a different way. His technique was a good deal what was taught him by some thoroughly competent master; that is, what one might call his preliminary technique—his manner of laying in a picture. In finishing it became much more personal.

Where he varied from the rest was in his sentiment of design, his intuition for colour values, his indifference to anecdotage, his bulldog way of hanging on to a thing until it was done. His feeling for edges was different from the rest, although it was a characteristic of all the Dutchmen to pay attention to them. And then his sense of "values"—the relation of things—was more



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

acute than it has ever been in any one else. That, indeed, explains everything. His refinement, his charm, his design, all at the last analysis are the result of his very just sense of the right relation of things.

As we have already seen, there are certain points of resemblance in Vermeer's work to De Hooch, Terburg, Metzsu and Maes, both in general and to each one in particular. All these men painted, roughly speaking, the same sort of picture. The conversation-piece which the Dutch burgher so loved was to these artists at the same time a delight and a bread-winner. Superficially, one might suppose all these pictures to be about the same. It is as a white man is apt to think all negroes look alike. But of course on examination one finds that all these painters differed enormously, one from the other, in point of view, sentiment about nature, arrangement, design, colour and handling. It only brings home to us the fact that no two men are ever the least bit alike in essentials, however much they may resemble each other in details and in the superficial aspect of things.

Terburg was primarily a stylist and a self-conscious stylist. Vermeer of course was a stylist

## OLD MASTERS

as well—but one would guess an unconscious stylist. What makes one think this is that whenever he really tried to be particularly “stylish” he inevitably—if one may use the current phrase—“fell down.” Terburg’s little figures are always painted in a stylistic way; in that is, at the same time, one of their merits and one of their particular failings. One has only to look at the way in which he painted the tips of the fingers to see that he was a mannerist. He had his little way of doing things; at the last moment he made things as he liked to have them look instead of as they did look. Vermeer, too, was something of a mannerist in his way of starting things; but the more he worked on them the less mannered they became, so that his most highly finished works are miracles of unprejudiced rendering. No matter what mood influenced him at the start, his passion for rendering the aspect of things conquered in the end.

In just one instance did Terburg paint a picture like Vermeer. That is the *Musician* of the Berlin Gallery. It is so much like Vermeer in composition that at first one is tempted to think it has been attributed to the wrong man. But when one examines it carefully one perceives that

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

the manner of making it is quite different. Still it is enough like to make one wonder whether Terburg had ever seen any of Vermeer's work.

With Metzsu it was rather different. He may have meant to be a stylist but a *naïf* streak in him kept him from it. He was an executant. There is not another man in the history of art who could handle his brushes more skilfully than he. He did not always see rightly; or rather, one feels that he did not take the trouble to look at a thing over and over again until he thoroughly understood it, as did Vermeer. He had his sound yet brilliant technique, which sufficed to render quite quickly, ably and plausibly anything he looked at; and with such a result he usually seems to have remained satisfied. He was not willing, as was Vermeer, to endanger the whole brilliancy of his handling by perpetual repaintings. He seems to have finished up the thing quite skilfully, rather quickly, and to have been satisfied with that result. His manner of laying on paint was of the slippery fused sort, and he seems to have been unwilling to endanger the fused surface which he gained in this way.

Also, he was not above slightly distorting his "values" when it suited his book. In the *Money-*



*Gerard Terburg*

## THE CONCERT

KAISER FRIEDRICH MUSEUM, BERLIN



## OLD MASTERS

*Changer* of the Boston Museum, which is perhaps his finest work, he has deliberately made white near the window darker than the white in the middle of the picture — so as to centralise the interest. Vermeer could always achieve the same centralising of interest without modifying the values at all.

At one time Metzu seemed in train to do work as good as Vermeer. Certain of his pictures suggest Vermeer very much, and, curiously enough, these are ones painted a little before Vermeer's finest period. But Metzu fell off from this high standard, so that his later works are a little lacking in the same sort of interest. "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel."

As far as we can judge, Vermeer went right on from picture to picture, painting them better all the time. If it be true, as one feels from interior evidence, that the *Studio* was his latest work, then his latest work was his best.

Between Vermeer and De Hooch there are certain very strong elements of likeness. The two men lived in Delft at the same time for a period covering at least three years, possibly more. It seems impossible that they should not have known each other, both being, as we know they

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

were, members of the Guild of St. Luke. Doubtless they were both influenced by Fabritius, and doubtless, too, all three must have interchanged thoughts and views about art. Many of De Hooch's pictures are, of course, magnificent creations, and he shared with Vermeer his passion for painting the complicated lights of an interior. But one of the points in which De Hooch was the inferior of the other man was that he did not get his values so well. He was capable of distorting them — apparently deliberately. In certain of his pictures the sunlit street, seen through an open door, comes darker than certain lights in the interior, and this we know could not be true. Also, it seems just to say that Vermeer never could have done this. In all his pictures after he had got thoroughly under way we do not find a false value. This unerring sense of values is, of course, one of Vermeer's half-dozen unapproachable qualities. It is one of the things that make him definitely superior to the other Dutch painters. It cannot be too much insisted on, for when one is filled with this idea one has begun to understand Vermeer. When one says "values" one includes colour values. It is the understanding of values; that is, the relation

## OLD MASTERS

of things in light and shade, colour drawing and edges that makes Vermeer — that makes him the unique man he is.

It may seem too much praise to mention Maes in the same breath with Vermeer. But the point of contact between the two men is that both have been said to have come under French influences. In Maes' case this is evident enough. No one could look at some of his latest portraits and not observe their likeness in style and technique to many of the portraits then being done by the master painters of the court of the fourteenth Louis.

With Vermeer, if there were any influence of this sort, it shows in a much more subtle way. Every one in Holland was reacting against the messy *empaté* manner of Rembrandt, and Vermeer was of the number — apparently one of the leaders. So that his surface grew smoother and smoother as the years went on. Dr. Valentiner goes so far as to call it glassy.

Certainly it was very smooth, but this may well have come about because Vermeer perceived, as any thoughtful painter is bound to discover, that a picture begun with loaded or *empaté* surface cannot be changed, repainted, or retouched



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

with the same ease as can a smooth surface. As the essence of Vermeer's technique lay in constant repaintings, it seems natural enough that he should have chosen to keep his surface in a state that would easily admit of repainting. Also he doubtless noticed that there were no paint strokes to be seen in nature; and we feel that he tried to make his pictures look like nature.

One feels then that Maes gave in to French technique because it was fashionable; that if Vermeer was influenced by it, it was because he found it more logical and intelligent.

A great deal has been said by Bürger and others of the probable or possible influence of Rembrandt upon Vermeer. But it is hard to see that they make out a very strong case. Rembrandt was such an overwhelming individuality that men tend to attribute the excellencies of other men to his influence merely because he was so great. The great point of likeness between Vermeer and Rembrandt is their common interest in light and shade—or *chiaroscuro*. It is true that they were both thus interested, but interested in entirely different ways. Rembrandt liked *chiaroscuro* because by his particular use of

## OLD MASTERS

it he was enabled to make things different from the way they really did look; that is, he made them mysterious. Vermeer was interested in light and shade because, as used by him, it helped to make his pictures look more like nature. It was as statistics help a liar to lie and an honest man to tell the truth.

The whole attitude of the two men before nature differed. Rembrandt apparently wished that nature looked different. Vermeer, one would guess, was glad that nature looked as she looked.

Rembrandt seemed not satisfied with the colour of things and so changed it to suit his desire. Vermeer's particular merit lies in the fact that he tried to render the beauty of colour that happened to be before his eyes. The only thing in which Rembrandt seems to have tried to be a realist was in the matter of drawing. And this only shows because he succeeded in making nude drawings of poor squalid humanity more hideous than it really is. Vermeer did not flatter, but did not degrade.

This is not to say that Rembrandt was not a very great man; one feels he was. Occasionally in portraits of himself he attains to astonishing verity in parts. But he seems dissatisfied with

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

life and with the aspects of life, and he either made it as he would like to have it or caricatured its infirmities.

Vermeer seems to have loved life; he chose the harder part in art—to make things beautiful, quiet, serene. It is a commonplace that it is easier to write an artistic story of how the course of true love never did run smooth, than to write the story of a happy love, so that it shall be interesting and artistic. Vermeer's story was the harder to tell—the simple story of health and happiness—of light and life and love.

Rembrandt could paint a lot of simple archers so that they looked like a crew of bandits. Vermeer could paint a simple little Dutch lady tying pearls about her neck so that one saw the beauty of simple things.

What really made Vermeer different from all these others was the absolute impersonality of his vision. One feels in the work of Terburg, for instance, that he sometimes made things as he would like to have them, or sometimes in a way that was comparatively easy to do, and, having done so, tried to persuade himself that nature looked so. There is in human beings the need to

## OLD MASTERS

justify themselves to themselves. One sees this in students, who, having made a thing wrong, try to persuade themselves that so it was. Even artists, alas, are not wholly free from this defect. Self criticism is the most uncommon and most difficult of virtues. Yet Vermeer seems to have had it — or rather, he saw so straight and looked so persistently that it seems to have been a pleasure to him to correct what was wrong in his work. One knows this because the things he had just wiped in are not especially good, while the things he has worked over are miracles.

It resulted from this impersonality of vision and of intention that Vermeer's work became more vitally personal than that of any man. There is the humour of it. For in a country where all were blind, the seeing man would be king. And Vermeer could see. If ever any man in the history of the world could see superlatively well, he was that man. All the Dutchmen excelled in observation, but he looked harder and oftener than the rest. And from this very intensity of vision he was obliged to invent a personal manner that would fittingly render what he saw. Moreover, looking oftener and harder than the rest, he saw that things looked slightly

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

different than men had supposed. If they looked different, of course his pictures, rightly rendered, must also look different from the rest; and so, indeed, they do.

It has been said that there are really only two kinds of painting: good painting and bad painting. The man who said this thought that good painting meant painting things the way they looked to him; bad painting meant any other kind. This may or may not be so; but if it be so, then all good painters have a certain relationship through the fact that their works resemble nature. As supreme examples of these good painters one thinks of men so different as Da Vinci, Titian, Velasquez, Chardin and a few others. These were men who were interested in painting the aspect of nature,—who did not seek to twist her about and change her, but who were satisfied so far as in them lay to paint the thing as they saw it. It is interesting to compare the work of these men with Vermeer. It may be that we shall be able to pick out certain qualities common to all of them.

Da Vinci is not always thought of as a realist, but one only has to read his book on drawing



*Jan Vermeer of Delft*

ALLEGORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT  
ROYAL PICTURE GALLERY, THE HAGUE; LENT BY  
DR. A. BREDIUS



## OLD MASTERS

and painting to see that he thought of himself as one, and that he thought pictures should reproduce the appearance of nature. There is no talk of suggestiveness; his constant appeal is that one shall observe things and make them the way they look. For instance, he says if a man painting outdoors wants to find the real colour of the landscape he should put up a bit of glass and match the tones of the objects behind it. One could hardly be more objective than that.

The point in common between Da Vinci and Vermeer is *chiaroscuro*. Da Vinci might almost be said to have invented it. For before his time it practically did not exist in art; while some of his exercises in it are among the most complete that have ever been made. And since his time it has always been one of the measures of a painter's greatness. Da Vinci, by the aid of *chiaroscuro*, showed painters how to make things "like." Nowadays some people seem to think it a base thing that things should seem like. But Da Vinci did not think so, if one may believe his written word, and his work was particularly admired by his contemporaries because it looked so much like nature.



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

We cannot compare Vermeer's interiors with anything Da Vinci has done, but there is a distinct likeness in *chiaroscuro* between Vermeer's two pictures of heads of young girls and the *Monna Lisa* and other heads by Da Vinci. The Arenburg head is perhaps superficially more like Da Vinci, but it looks as if it had been "skinned" — or over-cleaned. The head at the Hague has precisely the Da Vinci quality of light sliding across the forms of the head; of forms indicated by the play of the light and shade rather than by sculpturesque brush marks made in the direction of the planes.

It is interesting in connection with this matter of *chiaroscuro* to note that it had been a matter of the most profound interest to painters for more than a hundred years before Rembrandt's time. Many people speak as if Rembrandt had invented light and shade, — that is, as if no one had specialised in it before his time. Apart from Da Vinci, Correggio had carried it well up to its legitimate possibilities long before Rembrandt. Caravaggio's whole school was based on it; and the Eclectics, more influenced than they cared to admit by Caravaggio, taught it in their schools. Holland, in the sixteenth century, was almost

## OLD MASTERS

wholly under the influence of various phases of Italian art, and *chiaroscuro* was one of these. It was one of the things that was taught in the schools, and Rembrandt learned about it just like any other. It is true that he made great case of it, carrying it beyond its proper limitations. But anybody else was at liberty to paint by light and shade in a truthful manner as did Vermeer without any particular thought of Rembrandt. If Rembrandt had never lived, *chiaroscuro* would still have been a characteristic of Dutch painters.

An enthusiastic writer has called Vermeer the Titian of Holland, and, while there is no superficial resemblance between the two men, still, if one wanted to justify this saying, one might say that Vermeer was the greatest colourist of Holland; that his *chiaroscuro* was based like Titian's, on the study of the colour of the shadow as well as of the light, and that his compositions were conceived with a view to colour arrangement as well as being designs in line and light and dark. We do not get the true Titian, the man himself, who had certain analogies to Vermeer, until late in his life. He had to shake off the archaic school training of the Bellinis and, still more difficult to outgrow, the overpowering influence of so

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

great a genius as Giorgione, before he began to express his true self—to paint things something as he really saw them. Toward the end of his life he began to paint “blonde,” that is, to note the cool over-tones of colours and Vermeer, Velasquez, Chardin and all men who feel colour values paint blonde. The *Rape of Europa* in the Gardner Museum is a good example of this sort of vision. He began, too, to paint by the spot instead of along the line, and it is most instructive and interesting to study his *Adam and Eve* at the Prado in connection with Rubens’ copy.

Rubens in his copy, which hangs near by, cheerfully commits all the solecisms which Titian had spent a lifetime in learning to avoid. One feels that in his old age Titian came to realize the painter’s joy in trying to paint the thing as he sees it,—and Vermeer knew this joy as well.

When one studies the *Toilet of Diana*, particularly noting the way the back of one of the nymphs is painted, one perceives a marked resemblance to some of Velasquez’s work. The technique of this bit is not unlike the technique of the *Forge of Vulcan*. This is not to say that Vermeer had any particular thought of

## OLD MASTERS

Velasquez while painting it, although it is known that Terburg studied Velasquez' work, and in so small a place as Holland it is likely that some word about the paintings of the great Spaniard must have passed from mouth to mouth in the studios. It is just possible that Bramer, who was a citizen of the world, may have known something of Velasquez' painting. At all events, there is this distinct resemblance in the *Diana* picture, and, though none of Vermeer's other pictures have such a resemblance, they are painted in Velasquez's mood — of rendering the beauty of the light and life he saw before him. When artists discuss who the greatest painter, as a painter, may have been, they always end with Velasquez and Vermeer. These two men more than any one else seem to have thought that —

“ If eyes were ever made for seeing  
Then beauty is its own excuse for being.”

They seem to have realised that if a thing were beautiful it was beautiful because it looked just as it did look; and that if one tried to extract the quintessence of some particular flavour the unique beauty of the whole thing was apt to evaporate in the process.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

Velasquez also painted blonde, and his only particular weakness seems to have been that he permitted himself to modify the values as in the case before cited of the incandescent metal of the *Forge of Vulcan*. He seems, at times, too, to have used a sort of black soup—the Spartan remedy—to pull things together. He told the truth, but not quite the whole truth, and not always nothing but the truth. It is hard to imagine a young painter learning anything but good from Vermeer; one only has to look at Del Mazo's work, fascinating as it is, to realise what Velasquez run wild might come to.

When one looks at Chardin's delightful little interiors one thinks of all the little Dutchmen—perhaps of Vermeer as much as any. But it is really in studying his still life that any likeness Chardin may have had to Vermeer disengages itself. When Chardin painted still life he seems to have dared to make things just as they appeared. In his interiors, he made concessions to the taste of the times in things like the proportions of the figures, the drawing of the extremities; and he seems to have rubbed some sort of brown stuff on for "tone."

Before one blames him, one must remember



---

*Jan Vermeer of Delft*

A LADY AND A MAID-SERVANT  
COLLECTION OF JAMES SIMON, BERLIN



## OLD MASTERS

the difficulty of painting objectively as he did, amid a horde of artists who painted *de chic*.

Indeed, it is a mystery that such a modest little stone-crop of a flower as was Chardin's talent should have bloomed at all in the over rich soil of the garden of eighteenth century art.

Chardin's still life, then, has something of the impersonality that marks Vermeer's work, and it is interesting to note that a picture by Vermeer's master, or friend, Fabritius, called the *Goldfinch*, is remarkably like Chardin in quality.





## **VERMEER AND MODERN PAINTING**



## CHAPTER VIII

### VERMEER AND MODERN PAINTING

**A**LTHOUGH Vermeer has been a good deal talked about of late, it may be said that his influence over modern artists is only just beginning. It is true that to certain artists his work has for a long time been very important and indeed a fruitful source of inspiration. But to the uninitiated his name is hardly known, his work a closed book. Indeed, since beginning this book the writer has met with various persons, supposedly well informed in matters of art, who have expressed a complete ignorance as to who Vermeer might be. Of course, to collectors his work is becoming well known. The mere cost of one of his pictures makes it a matter of interest to them. The fact that there are only six or seven of his works extant in itself gives them a certain value. And among artists his name is doubtless better known than among the

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

simple-minded laity. At the same time there is no doubt that the great mass of so-called art lovers make very little case of him; his star has not as yet swum into their rather purblind ken.

Still, it seems evident that his influence will increase, and the reasons for this belief are these: at present there are two markedly different schools or modes of thought in painting. One gives itself to expression of quaint conceits or fancies done in a fashion more or less vaguely suggestive of nature; the other is interested in giving the exact appearance of nature—making it like, in short. For these last Vermeer is a master,—his name a rallying-cry. To them his work seems in many ways the nearest approach to truth that has been made.

His attitude toward nature—his point of view, in short—seems to these painters the correct attitude; his manner of rendering most logical. Vermeer, in his simple, doubtless unconscious way, has met and solved some of the most difficult problems of the interior. It is true that his study of colour values is hardly so acute as that of some of our modern men. His sense of colour values was instinctive; he had the intuition of colour, rather than the highly trained thought-out

## VERMEER AND MODERN PAINTING

conscious method which the more advanced modern interior painters use.

Still Vermeer had enough of this perception of colour values to make the men who paint interiors at the present day rise up and call him blessed. He made up for any weakness in structure, or lack of comprehension of colour theory by simply looking at the thing before him so hard and so often that he came at the end to understand it to the full. And what one understands one can render. Certainly no one ever rendered the aspect of nature more convincingly than he.

Even twenty years ago there were men who painted more or less in Vermeer's manner. Claus Meyer, the German painter, seems to have studied his work quite carefully, though unfortunately the qualities in Meyer's work which remind one of Vermeer are rather superficial ones. It is more in the arrangement of his rooms and the costumes of his models that he recalls Vermeer than in his colour quality or values.

It is said that Vermeer's *View of Delft* has had a very distinct and marked effect on the younger school of Dutch landscape painters. Indeed, one has seen pictured silhouettes of Dutch houses re-

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

flected against a canal that remind one a good deal of this same *View of Delft*. Certainly Vermeer's influence is a healthy one—far healthier than that of Israëls or of Rembrandt. A whole school of landscape painting might have been built around Vermeer's work in his own day. And even now, when landscape painters have discovered many things, there is still much to be learned from study of his work.

As we have hinted before, one of the things that interests us in Vermeer, apart from his many perfections, is his intensely modern attitude, his point of view about painting—about composition, colour values, "edges" and many of the other things in which modern artists particularly concern themselves. No one, of course, knows definitely anything about what Vermeer thought or tried to do. But from the study of his works one gains a pretty good idea of what his intention and point of view was. He had the modern interest in values—and this includes colour values—to the full. We cannot tell if he thought himself different from other men in his effort, but it is evident enough that his effort was different—that he tried for other things than the men about him. More than any

## VERMEER AND MODERN PAINTING

of the rest of them, he interested himself in painting the apparition before him.

One particularly modern thing about Vermeer's art is his avoidance of story-telling. Of course, there is in every one of his pictures, except the *Studio*, a thin thread of anecdote, but it is of the most tenuous sort. Vermeer could hardly avoid, in the Holland of his day, some sort of story. But one easily sees that it did not particularly interest him and that the design, the colour scheme and the rendering were the elements that most engaged his attention. In Jan Steen's work, for instance, the anecdote was almost everything. Even with Terburg and with Metzu it was quite an important element. De Hooch, indeed, is almost the only other Dutchman who seemed so indifferent as Vermeer to anecdote for the sake of anecdote. Vermeer came as near to having his little figures do nothing at all as one well could unless they sat with folded hands. A young girl reads a letter or writes one, or receives it from the hand of a serving-maid, — that accounts for a half-dozen of his pictures.

A young woman plays with pearls about her neck, she opens a casement, she pours some milk from a jug into a bowl, she takes a glass of wine



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

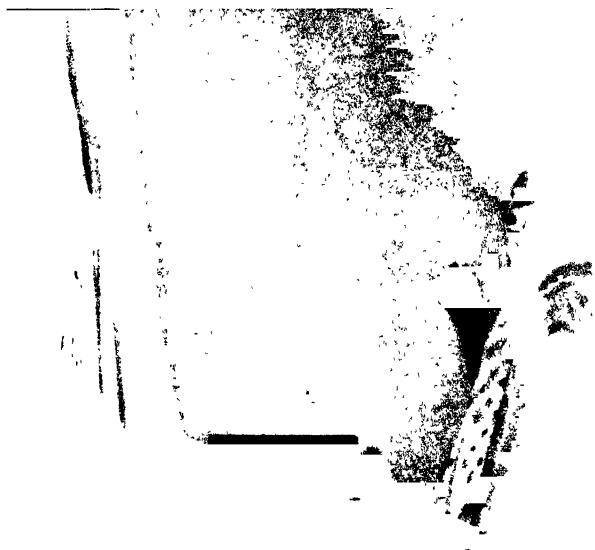
from a gallant's hand, — these are the trifling anecdotes that inform a few more of his pictures. In each one there is just enough anecdote to interest those who love a story, but there is never so intricate an intrigue as to endanger the effectiveness of his piece.

Vermeer was a precursor in many things, and in none more than in the way in which he anticipated the modern point of view. If ever a man believed in art for art's sake it was he. There never was a more definite example of art for art's sake than the *Studio*. If the picture had not been well made it would have been absolutely nothing. Being as it is, well made, it is one of the few flawless masterpieces of painting. Even where there is a trifling anecdote one feels that the composition, the aspect and the rendering were everything to him.

He anticipated the modern idea of impersonality in art which has perhaps gone further in these days in novel writing than it has in painting. His pictures are personal because they are made by a very great man; but the personality is a by-product. There is absolutely no effort to make them personal. He makes no comment on

**JAN VERMEER OF DELFT**  
**A YOUNG LADY WITH A PEARL NECKLACE**  
**KAISER FRIEDRICH MUSEUM, BERLIN**







## VERMEER AND MODERN PAINTING

the picture. One does not see by his composition what he thought of it all.

Indeed, in this matter Vermeer was *plus Royaliste que le Roi*. No modern painter has as yet achieved his absolute impersonality of rendering. In almost all of them one perceives a liking for certain tricks of handling — for certain aspects of paint. Vermeer, it is true, had certain very marked mannerisms, but they always seem to spring from his desire to give the exact aspect of nature. Instead of one of his mannerisms being a trick repeated because he did it rather well, it is, like his *pointillé* touch, always some expedient which might help more exactly to render the precise aspect of nature.

In certain respects Vermeer is distinctly the superior of any modern painter; in others it is not so much that he was inferior as that he did not concern himself with those particular things. The whole matter of disintegrated colour, which perturbs modern artists even in the painting of interiors, is a closed book to him. He simply did not have to do anything about it, since the theory of colour was not then invented. He arrived at his results without considering it; unless one feels his habit of underpainting with

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

blue and painting over with warm tones to have something to do with it. Probably almost all good painters even before Chevreuil and Rood have in some way used disintegrated colour empirically without having any particular theory about the matter. Underpainting in blue or green or red, glazing and scumbling, have all been ways by which the elder painters arrived at results somewhat similar to some of our impressionistic achievements. In these ways Vermeer, too, doubtless worked, but doubtless, also, he was unconscious of any scientific theory about the matter.

Where Vermeer seems to have surpassed any modern was in the serenity and finish of his work. Modern work is often violent, perturbed, hasty. We have, indeed, come to distrust work that is different from this in spirit. Yet Vermeer's work is different from this. We know he painted for a space of twenty-five years. During this time we know of his producing rather less than two-score works, and after one examines these it does not seem likely that he produced many more. They are too patiently wrought, too studied, to allow us to think that they could be produced without taking thought, and no vain or shallow

## VERMEER AND MODERN PAINTING

thought at that. They are carried further than is anything that is done now. That is what one feels in looking at certain brilliant modern things which are inspired, let us say, by Vermeer's oracle. They have his effectiveness — often much of his skill in arrangement; often, indeed, certain aspects of colour about which he did not concern himself; but they do not have his patient finish and so do not have his serenity. One cannot conceive of any modern man painting a passage like the fringe on the curtain of the *Dresden Reader*, the stripes on the man's costume in the *Studio*, or the map in the same picture. A modern doubtless would not even attempt it; he would say it was a mistake to do it in that way; that it should be handled in a looser, more suggestive way. He might or might not be right; but certainly in his results he would be different. Vermeer was almost Asiatic in his willingness to give endless labour to the perfecting of a small detail in his work, if he saw some way of making it better than it was. We are not willing to give that labour — we feel we cannot; our life is too perturbed and broken in on for that. Our mottoes reflect our state of mind. "Life is too short for that," we say.



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

"Hurry up, time is money," is another of our pleasant sayings.

Time apparently was of no importance with Vermeer. Like Red Jacket he might have said, "there's all the time there is." He makes one think of that Philosopher of whom Emerson speaks who sought a walking-stick. While he sought it the world came to an end. While he peeled it properly the solar system fell into the sun; and while he polished it as it should be polished the universe came to an end; but he had a perfect walking-stick. Vermeer's spirit was of like nature. It mattered nothing to him how long or how short a time it took him to make the knob on the end of a map stick—he was concerned in getting it right and laboured till it was right. His spirit was of the same nature as Browning's Grammarian. He based the enclitic in  $\delta\eta$ , no matter how long it took, but he got it right. He seems to have had a passion for rightness that we do not attain to; and a knowledge and intelligence added to his diligence that allowed him to attain to it, in larger measure, at least, than do other men. His work, for instance, was immensely more finished in essentials than that of Van Eyck or other primitives whose

## VERMEER AND MODERN PAINTING

works we think of as miracles of laborious finish. For the Primitives, with all their finish, had a certain manner of attaining a thing. If, for instance, they painted the gold thread shown in some drapery, they ticked off the high lights all of the same value with a skilful hand, thinking of something else the while. One can see this from the result. When Vermeer painted a sleeve shot with gold thread, as in his picture at the Brunswick Gallery, the value, shape and edge of each touch was the result of separate intellectual efforts.

Vermeer's finish, then — and one uses the term without meaning smoothness, though smoothness was one of the elements of his finish — was far beyond anything that we achieve. We see dimly how he did it, but we are not willing to make the sacrifices necessary for it. We are like that rich young man in Holy Writ who asked what he might do to be saved, but when told to sell all and follow Christ "went away very sorrowful." We, however, are not even sorrowful; we simply pretend that we do not think finish worth while — that the grapes are sour.

Although Vermeer had an intuition for colour, an unconscious sense of colour values, his work is

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

not always the equal of some modern things in this respect. Sometimes it is. In the *Studio* and in the *Love-Letter* of the Rijks Museum the colour values are so good that he achieves, humanly speaking, just the aspect of nature. If these pictures are among his last, as one guesses from interior evidence, he was certainly approaching to the goal we moderns strive for. Some of his pictures do not have this quality; they are greyish or greenish or bluish in tone. One likes to believe that this rose from certain mistakes in the use of colours that did not last rather than from any defect in vision. It is impossible to think otherwise when one considers the results he achieved in the two works we have mentioned.

A man does not go on seeing colour wrong all his life and suddenly see right. The two pictures cited are alone enough to prove Vermeer's sense of colour values. And surely that sense must have been in a measure conscious, since one does not achieve so difficult a thing without taking thought.

We have seen that Vermeer did not concern himself with our preoccupations about disintegrated colour. He could not well do this since the hypothesis on which colour theories are based

## VERMEER AND MODERN PAINTING

was not as yet proposed. But, as we have also seen, he did concern himself a good deal with underpaintings of blue, with glazes and with scumbles, by which something of disintegrated colour was suggested. Another quality, which makes him in a very different way from theirs, suggest the neo-impressionists, was his *pointillé* touch. He used it with solid dull tones — with no attempt at juxtaposing complementary colours in small touches as they do. Yet in a certain sense he seems to have used the touch for something the same reason that they do. That is, he seems to have had a sense with them of the illusiveness of light, of its intangibility. He seems with them to have sometimes striven to give a sense of the light falling on the object, to give some suggestion of the “halation” of light, of its spreading nature, of a certain breadth which could not be suggested by modelling along the form or by hatching across the edge of the lights.

In England Orpen has painted a number of interiors which may not be influenced by Vermeer more than by some other of the Dutchmen but which have a good deal of his sense of pattern, of designing in black against a white ground.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

Orpen is a very brilliant and clever painter, but it is only fair to point out that his brother-in-law William Rothenstein had done the same sort of thing with remarkable success for some years before. Although Rothenstein now paints pictures of quite a different *genre*, his little interiors seem the most attractive and sympathetic things he has done. One would say that Orpen's pictures were much blacker than are the works of the Dutchman. They are perhaps lacking in a sense of colour values. But they are strongly drawn and are certainly now among the most interesting things of the English school.

Certain of our American artists have undoubtedly been influenced by Vermeer. And one says this with confidence, because they would be the first to say that they have studied his work carefully and have learned much from it.

Mr. Thomas Dewing has been said to show some influence of Vermeer in his pictures of charming little women doing nothing with passionate earnestness, who make gestures of fascinating futility such as Helleu has suggested with such sympathetic charm and which Degas has rendered with such cruelty. Mr. Dewing's work, while not at all like Vermeer's in technical pro-



---

*Artist unknown (Formerly attributed to Jan Vermeer of Delft by Burger-Thore)*

THE SLEEPING SERVANT

COLLECTION OF P. A. B. WIDENER, PHILADELPHIA



## VERMEER AND MODERN PAINTING

cesses, does, indeed, suggest him in its carefulness, its skilful technique and its refinement. Yet these little women of Mr. Dewing's are not of the same nature as are the *huis-vrouwen* of Vermeer. They are sad little princesses of perilous lands forlorn, who sit in an atmosphere heavy with burning incense and listen vaguely as if to low lutes of love concealed behind some adventitious screen. Their tired eyes seem wearied from too much love of living; as the Irish say, their "heart's broke for pleasure." The burden of modern life is on them.

Vermeer's women, on the other hand, are serene in the antique manner. They breathe an air of crystalline clearness despite the dull atmosphere of Holland. Where Dewing's ladies are quite American in their slender forms, in the bony attachment of their wrists and collarbones, Vermeer's are wholly Dutch with their healthy faces and rounded forms. Certainly the *Pearl Necklace* is one of the most *raffiné* pictures ever painted. But its refinement is that of perfect health, seen by a perfectly normal vision and rendered with flawless technique. It is the refinement that comes from health rather than from disease.

Mr. Edmund C. Tarbell's work shows such



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

skill in design and technique that one instinctively thinks of Dutch art and of Vermeer in particular when seeing it. Mr. Tarbell comes by this naturally, for his first master, Mr. Otto Grundmann, was trained in the school of Antwerp where Baron Leys had dominated the teaching methods for a long time. Leys had studied De Hooch's work with great care, although later he interested himself particularly in the Van Eycks. But he understood Dutch technique thoroughly and taught something like it at the school. Grundmann had assimilated his technique and taught it to Tarbell and the other students of his time at the Boston Art Museum school. Mr. Tarbell's work and, though quite different, Mr. Paxton's as well, are very interesting as showing the effect of the Impressionistic movement when grafted, so to say, on good old Dutch stock. Both these men received a sound school training to begin with. Each in his way became interested in the Impressionistic movement and practised its principles for a time, and each has then taken up the study of interiors something in the manner of the Dutch school.

Mr. Tarbell's work, of course, recalls the Dutch

## VERMEER AND MODERN PAINTING

painters because the general subject is the same, but the pictures are really very different. Mr. Tarbell is intensely modern — in his colour, in his manner of handling paint, in his composition. His pictures are Modern Instances, so to say — “*Variations sur une thème connue.*” Certainly they are among the most successful modern things, and he has been able to discover and render new beauties in the painting of interiors.

Mr. W. M. Paxton is one of the most brilliant painters of interiors of these days. And if his work suggests Vermeer, it is simply that he is interested in the same sort of thing and does it with much the simplicity and directness of the old master. Paxton’s work has one thing which certain of Vermeer’s pictures had to a remarkable degree — a startling sense of reality. If he were asked how he got this surprising effectiveness, he might say, as Courbet did on a similar occasion, “*Je cherche mes tons.*” That sums up his method. He studies his tones very carefully, and in painting tries to draw the shapes of the colour shifts in so far as their shapes may be designed. Paxton’s works have this essential difference from the Dutchmen, that he almost always paints standing up. This always makes for effective-

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

ness; though, as we have seen, one is not apt to finish so highly in this manner. But Paxton has an uncanny ability to finish, and certainly one never hears his pictures blamed for lack of finish.

Indeed, one sometimes hears his work criticised for its smoothness. Smoothness and finish are not necessarily the same thing, but one cannot get finish on a picture that is not smooth. Paxton's smoothness comes, like Vermeer's, from a conviction that things are made manifest by the shape of the tones and colours, not by brush strokes or crenellated paint surface.

What really makes him most like Vermeer in essentials is his determination to achieve what tones may be in his picture by the just relation of colour values rather than by any "muting" of tones or binding things together by glazes.

Mr. Joseph De Camp and Mr. Frank Benson have both painted charming simple figures and interiors not unlike in spirit to those of the Delft painter. Yet, perhaps, none of these is so direct a challenge to Vermeer as are some of the other modern works that have been mentioned.

But these things we have noted are but surface resemblances. Vermeer remains, after all is



*Jan Vermeer of Delft*

PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG GIRL

ARENBERG GALLERY, BRUSSELS



## VERMEER AND MODERN PAINTING

said and done, wholly himself. It is not only the mystery of his life that one cannot penetrate; one cannot wholly penetrate the mystery of his art. He is still the Sphinx that Bürger called him.

One can fancy him among his neighbors simple enough, most likely; or with his children — doubtless a good father of a lusty family. Yet with it all persisted this curious genius, so different from the genius of other men; a genius that did not reveal itself by his painting impossibilities, or going bankrupt, or ruffling it with the night watch, — but showed itself in that anguished acuteness of observation that made him see a little truer than other men. And with that was something more; a sense of the right relation of things, in line, in colour, and in form; and a curious instinct for colour, different from the rest, — colder and yet more æsthetic.

We can fancy him dying with his secret undiscovered — except that men in a puzzled way liked his pictures for the perfection of their technique.

And, as the French say, when one is dead it is for a long time. Certainly it was for him, even for his fame. Yet if, somewhere, in no man's land, a pale ghost — Vermeer yclept — should chance to linger; — if he thinks at all of our little doings here,

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

doubtless it comes not amiss to him that the perfection of his work, rather than any praise of men, did in the end bring these works to their own. To an artist there is a peculiar satisfaction in forcing recognition by the sheer merit of his handiwork. Certainly with Vermeer this has come about: for by his works we know him.

## VERMEER'S PICTURES





## CHAPTER IX

### VERMEER'S PICTURES

**A**BOUT twenty-one years after the death of Vermeer there occurred in Amsterdam, May 16, 1696, a sale of some hundred pictures by various artists. Among these were twenty-one pictures by Vermeer. These paintings are of great importance to us in tracing the pictures of Vermeer, because, if we find a picture very much in the manner of the master of Delft, and if its subject corresponds with one of those in the Catalogue of the Sale of 1696, we have an added reason for supposing the picture to be by Vermeer.

There follows the list of pictures from the Catalogue of the 1696 Sale with the comment printed at that time and with the prices. Prices in our money, together with additional comment, are printed in parentheses.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

### LIST OF VERMEERS IN 1696 AMSTERDAM SALE

1. *A Woman Weighing Gold* — in a case, painted in an extraordinarily skilful and strong manner . . . florins 155 (\$62; No. 10 in Hofstede de Groot's *Catalogue raisonné*. Now in the Widener Collection).

2. *A Maid-Servant Pouring out Milk* — exceedingly good . . . florins 175 (\$70. H. d. G. 17. Now in the Rijks Museum).

3. *The Portrait of Vermeer* — in a room with rich accessories painted in an unusually fine style . . . 45 florins (\$18. H. d. G. 8. Supposed by Dr. Hofstede de Groot to be the picture now in the Czernin Collection. Certain reasons for doubting this will be discussed later).

4. *A Lady Playing the Guitar* — very well painted . . . 70 florins (\$28; H. d. G. 26. Now in John G. Johnson's Collection in Philadelphia).

5. *An Interior* — a gentleman washing his hands, with a vista and figures; painted in a skilful and unusual style . . . 95 florins (\$38; H. d. G. 21. Not discovered).

6. *An Interior* — with a lady at the virginals and a gentleman listening. 80 florins (\$32;

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

H. d. G. 28. Possibly the one now at Windsor Castle).

7. *A Lady to whom a Maid-Servant is bringing a Letter* . . . 70 florins (\$28; H. d. G. 32. This may be the one in the Rijks Museum or possibly the one in the Simon Collection, Berlin).

8. *A Drunken Maid-Servant asleep behind a Table* . . . 16 florins (\$6.20; H. d. G. 3 Vanzype gives 62 florins (\$24.60). Probably the picture in the late B. Altman's Collection in New York).

9. *An Interior with Revellers* — well painted in a strong manner . . . 73 florins (\$29.20; undiscovered; although it has been thought to be the *Courtesan* or the *Brunswick Coquette*).

10. *An Interior* — with a gentleman making music, and a lady . . . 81 florins (\$32.40; H. d. G. 30; undiscovered).

11. *A Soldier with a Laughing Girl* — very fine . . . 44½ florins (\$17.60; H. d. G. 39. Now in the Collection of H. C. Frick, New York).

12. *A Girl Making Lace* . . . 28 florins (\$11.20; H. d. G. 11. Now in the Louvre).

. . . . .  
31. *A View of Delft from the South* . . . 200 florins (\$80; H. d. G. 48. Now in the Mauritshuis).

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

32. *A View of a House in Delft* . . . 72½ florins (\$29; H. d. G. 47. Now in the Six Collection, Amsterdam).

33. *A View of Some Houses* . . . 48 florins (\$19.20; H. d. G. 49; undiscovered).

35. *A Lady Writing* — very well painted . . . 63 florins (\$25.20; H. d. G. 35. Possibly in Mr. A. Beit's Collection, or it may be H. d. G. 36 which is in the Collection of the late J. P. Morgan).

36. *A Lady Adorning Herself* . . . 30 florins (\$12; H. d. G. 20. Now in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin).

37. *A Lady Playing the Spinet* . . . 42 florins (\$16.80; H. d. G. 23, 24, or 25. Now in the National Gallery if 23 or 25; if 24 in the Beit Collection).

38. *A Portrait in an Antique Costume* — painted in an unusual and skilful manner . . . — 36 florins (\$14.40; H. d. G. 44. Now in the Mauritshuis, The Hague).

39. Another similar portrait . . . 17 florins (\$6.80; H. d. G. 42. Now in the Arenberg Collection, Brussels).

40. A pendant to the last . . . 17 florins (\$6.80; not found).



*Jan Vermeer of Delft*

LADY WRITING

COLLECTION OF J. PIERPONT MORGAN; LENT TO THE  
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK



## VERMEER'S PICTURES

It is supposed that fifteen of these pictures have been recovered. In some cases, however, the wish seems father of the thought, and a picture will be supposed to be one of the 1696 Sale merely because the general subject seems the same.

There is certainly room for doubting if the *Portrait of Vermeer* is the same as the *Studio* of the Czernin Gallery. This matter will be discussed under the head of the picture itself.

Very possibly the *Lady Playing the Guitar* of Mr. Johnson's Collection is the No. 4 of the 1696 Sale, though it can hardly be called, at least in relation to Vermeer's other pictures, "very well painted."

No. 1 of the 1696 Catalogue has very recently been discovered or rediscovered in a most interesting way by Dr. Hofstede de Groot. The picture was known to exist because it kept turning up in sales, first in Holland in 1701 and in 1777, then at Munich in 1826, later in France, where it was in the Laperrière Collection, and later in that of Casimir-Périer. It was last heard of in the Casimir-Périer Sale of 1848 at London.

It seems the picture was repurchased by the son of the late owner and by him, apparently, given to his sister, the Countess de Ségur, sister of the



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

late President Casimir-Périer. At her house, where it had been reposing for over fifty years, apparently quite unknown, it was refound and authenticated by Dr. Hofstede de Groot.

Certain pictures of the 1696 Catalogue have never been found, and they are ones which we should very much like to have. For instance, No. 5, *Gentleman Washing his Hands*, sounds as if it were a good subject. Terburg did a *Lady Washing her Hands*, which is one of his most delightful works; No. 9, *Interior with Revellers* or, as it is sometimes called, *A Joyous Company*, has sometimes been thought to be the *Courtesan* of the Dresden Gallery. But it seems probable that this is another picture. No. 10, *A Gentleman Making Music, and a Lady*, might be any one of two or three of Vermeer's pictures. But the title is too vague to permit of any exact reasoning.

Another lost picture is No. 40, the companion piece to the picture belonging to the Vicomte d'Arenberg's *Head of a Woman*.

Still another lost picture is *View of a Street*, unless this be the *Street in Delft* of the Six Collection. There are two street scenes, in the 1696 Catalogue and only one of them is known

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

to exist. Whether this is No. 32 or 33 we have no exact means of knowing.

Beside the Catalogue of 1696 pictures, we also know of sixteen other pictures which are most probably by Vermeer. They are as follows:

*The New Testament*, now at the Mauritshuis of the Hague. This picture was noted in sales in 1699, in 1718, and in 1735, and was refound by Dr. Bredius.

*The Toilette of Diana* was sold in the Goldschmidt Sale, Paris, 1876, as a Nicholas Maes, for 4725 francs (\$945). Later, it was catalogued as a Vermeer of Utrecht, one hardly knows why, and is now quite generally thought to be by Vermeer of Delft.

*The Letter, or Reader*, of the Rijks Museum, which came from the Van der Hoop Collection. It had sold for 200 francs (\$40) in Paris, 1809; for 1060 francs (\$212) at the Lapeyrière Sale in 1825; 882 florins (\$352) in 1839.

*The Mistress and Servant*, which belonged to Lebrun, was later in the Dufour Collection, Marseilles. It was sold for 405 francs (\$81) in 1837; for 600 francs (\$120) in 1890, and now belongs to James Simon of Berlin.

*The Taste of Wine* of the Museum of Berlin.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

*The Glass of Wine, or Coquette*, of the Brunswick Gallery.

*The Christ at the House of Mary and Martha* of the Coats Collection, Skalmorlie Castle, Scotland.

*The Girl at the Spinnet* of the Beit Collection. The picture with a similar subject formerly in the Salting Collection has been acquired by the National Gallery.

*The Woman with a Pitcher, or Woman at a Casement*, of the Metropolitan Museum of New York, was in the Powerscourt Collection, later in that of the late Henry G. Marquand of New York.

*The Concert, or A Musical Trio*, of the Gardner Museum of Boston.

*The Girl Reading at a Window, or The Letter*, of the Dresden Gallery, sold in Paris in 1742, was first attributed to Rembrandt, later to Pieter de Hooch.

*The Courtesan, or The Procureess*, is possibly the *Interior with Revellers*, No. 9 in the 1696 Catalogue. The small price paid, 73 florins (\$29.20), leads one to doubt if so large a picture sold for such a sum.

*The Portrait of a Woman* of Buda-Pesth.

*The Girl with a Flute*, property of Knoedler and Company.

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

The *Portrait of a Young Man*, Museum of Brussels, thought by some to be by Vermeer.

*The Studio* discovered by Waagen and Bürger in the Czernin Collection of Vienna where it had been attributed to Pieter de Hooch.

There seems to be some confusion about the two *Pendants* of the 1696 Catalogue. Dr. Hofstede de Groot evidently considers them as the Arenberg head and another not yet found. Mr. Vanzype apparently thinks that they are two of the three *Astronomer* subjects, one of which is also called the *Geographer*.

There is also a *Lesson* in the National Gallery, but this is evidently not by Vermeer.

There follows a complete list, so far as is possible, of the pictures known to be by Vermeer, with detailed description and such analysis and comment as seem proper to the matter in hand.

A CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ OF THE KNOWN WORKS OF  
VERMEER OF DELFT

UNITED STATES

CONCERT

In the Collection of Mrs. John L. Gardner,  
Boston

A group about a harpsichord. A young girl, seated, in profile, facing to the right, is playing. A gentleman sits near the spinet, his back to the spectator. Standing nearby, in three quarters, toward the right of the canvas, and facing toward the left, is the figure of a lady. She is dressed in a jacket trimmed with white swansdown, and holds a bit of paper in her left hand at which she is looking, while her right hand beats time. The man is dressed in a plain coloured coat over which a bandolier is stretched: he sits in a chair upholstered in green and blue tapestry. The young girl wears a silk gown and has ribbons in her hair. Just above her head, on the

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

wall, is a large landscape, while the painted inside of the spinet cover sets off the head of the man, and a larger picture relieves the head of the woman; the wall is of a violet grey. A table in the foreground to the left of the picture is covered by a crumpled rug and by a guitar. A cello lies nearby on the floor, which is in black and white tessellated pavement.

Canvas, 28 inches by 25 inches.

It was in the Sale of the Baroness van Leyden, Paris, 1804, and later in the Bürger-Thoré Collection; sold in Paris, December, 1892, for 29,000 francs (\$5800).

One feels at once that this is a Vermeer, painted in his best period. It is particularly fine in design. The background fills a distinct part in carrying out the pattern — a quality distinctive in Vermeer's best work and one which differentiates him from other Dutch painters. One notes that the figures are far back in the canvas — almost against the wall. This arrangement occurs only in the *Music Lesson* of Vermeer's other work. This, together with certain technical qualities, leads one to think the picture may have been painted at about the same time as the Windsor example.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

The introduction of the dark table with massed draperies as a foil to the rest of the composition is peculiarly characteristic of Vermeer and, so far as one remembers, of no other painter of his time.

Perhaps the most charming figure is that of the young girl playing, wholly characteristic of Vermeer in design and character, and quite different from the work of any other painter. There is great distinction in the quality of the pattern.

*Per contra*, the other figures are singularly stupid. One cannot but regret that Vermeer ever met the fat, bestial, greasy-looking man who appears in several of his pictures and whose back adorns this one. The standing lady is more successful — she fills well enough her place in her little world, though without distinction.

### A YOUNG WOMAN OPENING A CASEMENT

Metropolitan Museum of Fine Arts, New York

A young woman in a white kerchief, with a large collar on a yellow jacket with blue trimmings, and a blue skirt, stands near a casement, which she opens with her right hand. Her left hand holds a brass pitcher on a salver. The salver rests on a table covered with a parti-coloured Oriental rug.

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

On the wall to her left is a map — the wall is of that grey which Vermeer often painted. A lion-headed chair is behind the table, and a yellow jewel box is at the right of the self-same table.

Canvas,  $17\frac{1}{2}$  inches by  $15\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

This picture formerly belonged to Lord Powerscourt, was subsequently sold to Mr. Marquand of New York, and was by him in 1888 given to the Metropolitan Museum, where it now is. It is sometimes called *Young Woman with a Pitcher*, or *Water Jug*.

Technically, this is among the most skilful of Vermeer's performances; that is, there are very few falterings or weak passages such as appear in some of his works. He seems to have known just what he wanted to get and to have been able to render just what he desired.

In colour it is a very characteristic Vermeer in that the colour scheme resolves itself into blues and yellows with a certain amount of greys — an arrangement which one often finds with Vermeer and very seldom with anyone else. The tonality is of a marked bluish quality. Whether this comes from a bluish underpainting, as has been suggested, is difficult to decide absolutely, although



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

it seems very possible. It is questionable if it is so fine in colour as certain others, like *The Studio*, although this bluish tone is very popular with certain amateurs of Vermeer. Altogether the picture takes its place as one of his better works.

### LADY WRITING

Collection of the late J. Pierpont Morgan, New York  
(now loaned to the Metropolitan Museum of  
Art, New York)

A lady sits writing at a table. She leans forward and turns her head slightly toward the spectator. She wears a yellow morning jacket trimmed with ermine; the chair in which she sits is ornamented with gilt lions' heads. On the table are an inkstand, some pearls, and a casket. Behind her is a map rather obscured in the half light. The picture is lighted from a window at the extreme left.

Canvas, 18½ inches by 14½ inches.

This picture may have been in the Amsterdam Sale of 1696. It also probably appeared in the Luchtmans Sale, Rotterdam, 1816; the Kamernan Sale, Rotterdam, 1825; the Reydon Sale, Amsterdam, 1827, and De Robiano Sale, Brussels.

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

While there are many clever bits about this picture — notably the lions' heads which adorn the chair — it should be granted that the painting is among the least interesting of those by Vermeer. There is a terrible suggestion of Netscher in the technique, which leads one, indeed, to believe that the picture was painted toward the end of Vermeer's life, when whatever French influence existed was at its strongest. The tone of this particular picture is rather dismal — it is blacker in quality than most of our Vermeer's work. In looking carefully at the head one gets a sense that the background shows through. Apparently the whole picture was painted in the thinner, greyer manner which was possibly the result of French influence. Certainly Vermeer's later work shows some affinities to the later work of Terburg and of Maes — even to that of Netscher and of Mieris. Of course it was vastly superior to these latter, but the connection remains. There is even a something — not a likeness — but a manner of working similar to that of Lairese and some of the men of the third generation of Dutch art in the seventeenth century.

Certainly Lairese and his contemporaries frankly admitted the influence of the contemporary

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

French school, and both they and the Frenchmen, such as Lagillière, Rigaud, and Mignard, had certain points in common — a liking for clean, thoroughly understood technique, for clear bright colours, and for smooth surface. These qualities Vermeer shared with them, although his choice of subject remained for the most part pure genre.

It is evident that Vermeer had a certain liking for Latin art. If it be true that Leonard Bramer was his master, this may have been gained from him. We find Vermeer owning a *Crucifixion* apparently by Jordaens or at least a copy; the *Gipsy Woman* (now in Antwerp) by Dirk van Baburen, an academic artist who worked mostly in Italy. The Cupid which appears in three of his pictures seems to be a painting of similar type, perhaps even a French or an Italian.

### A GENTLEMAN AND A YOUNG LADY (or the Singing Lesson)

Collection of H. C. Frick, New York

A gentleman, apparently the same model as in the *Girl with the Wine Glass*, leans over a young lady to take or to give a paper which may or may



*Jan Vermeer of Delft*

A GENTLEMAN AND A YOUNG LADY, SOMETIMES  
CALLED THE MUSIC LESSON

COLLECTION OF HENRY C. FRICK, NEW YORK



## VERMEER'S PICTURES

not have some connection with the book of music on the table. The young lady turns her head away from him and towards the spectator. She is dressed in a red jacket and a blue skirt. She wears a white kerchief. Beside the music on the covered table, there are a mandolin and the jug of Chinese ware which appears so often in Vermeer's pictures, together with a glass of red wine. In front of the table, to the left, making an important detail in the composition, is a lion-headed chair in which lies a blue cushion. There is another chair of the same design, and the lady herself sits in still another of the same sort. The light comes from a leaded window to the left; on the wall, nearby, is a bird cage said to be painted by another hand. Behind the girl's figure is something which looks as if it might be a picture on the wall.

Dimly adumbrated thereon may be seen the same Cupid which appears in the *Lady at the Virginals* of the National Gallery and in the *Girl Asleep* of the Altman Collection. A curious detail is that in the Cupid of the *Girl Asleep* a mask appears in the right-hand corner of the picture. In the National Gallery example it does not appear. Whether Vermeer left this out in paint-

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

ing the picture on the wall, or whether in the Altman Collection he "chic-ed" or "faked" it in does not appear.

This may be the picture of the 1696 Sale catalogued *A Gentleman and a Lady Making Music*.

Panel, 14½ inches by 16½ inches (H. de Groot).

Canvas, 15¼ inches by 17¼ inches (W. R. Valentiner).

Sold at the Smeth Van Alphen Sale, Amsterdam, 1810, for 610 florins (\$244). It was in the Collection of Lewis Fry, Clifton, Bristol.

One thinks of the words of the good old hymn in looking at this picture, for

"Every prospect pleases,  
And only man is vile."

One sees and approves the well-known lions' heads, as exquisitely done as ever; the little white jug which we know so well is here, and the quaintly leaded casement; all these are treated in a most masterly way. Then, when one looks at the man or the girl, one does not feel the same æsthetic reaction. It must be confessed that our hero faltered here — they are not very well done. Indeed, when one looks at the ridiculous folds of

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

the young woman's dress one feels that they may have been repainted by some clumsier hand than Vermeer's. The man's draperies are better made because they are more logically constructed, but one does not feel the sense of light sliding across them in the way that Vermeer could do so well when he could get drapery to keep still for him. The girl's face, to be sure, is rather pretty, but by no means well constructed — that would not matter so much, since it was not Vermeer's specialty — but, unfortunately, even the light and shade, which were what he usually did particularly well, are here not very good. Compare the head and kerchief with the same things in *The Woman at a Casement* in the Metropolitan Museum, and note the difference. The weakly drawn hand and wrist and the slimpsy waist make one understand, after all, how his pictures were sometimes mistaken for those of Jan Steen, although the latter in his best moments could never have approached the painting of the accessories.

It is rather ungracious to speak of these defects, but they serve to show us markedly what Vermeer's strong points were and wherein he was not so able. Doubtless, in this case, he could not keep the models long enough or found difficulty in



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

making them keep the pose, for he has painted some of the finest heads ever made, for instance, the young girl's head at the Hague Museum. If he had painted them simply and frankly as if they were bits of still life, they might have been better. That was indeed his method in his greatest successes. But, at times, he seemed to lose his courage in painting the living model and to approach it in a different mood from that objective spirit which was what made him the great painter he was.

### THE SOLDIER AND THE LAUGHING GIRL

Collection of H. C. Frick, New York

A soldier sits in "lost profile" with his back slightly turned to the spectator. His right arm is akimbo, the hand resting on his thigh. He looks at a laughing girl who sits at the other side of a small table in a lion-headed chair. The girl's head is in three quarters; as she looks at the soldier her right hand holds a wine glass, her left rests upon the table.

The soldier sits in a lion-headed chair; his hat is black with a red ribbon and his baldric is of red with a bandolier. The girl's bodice is of black

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

and yellow, and she wears a white coif about her head.

The casement of a leaded window, to the left, is partly open to admit the light; above is a curtain. On the wall behind the girl's head and high up in the picture is a map of Holland and of West Friesland.

Not signed. This is No. 11, Amsterdam Sale, 1696, 44½ florins (\$17.60).

It belonged at one time to the Double Collection; not in the Deimdoff Collection, San Donato, as Havard says. It was long attributed to De Hooch, though it has nothing of his manner. Formerly in the Collection of Mrs. Joseph, London.

This picture has about it many of the earmarks of Vermeer. The lion-headed chairs are there and the map he was so fond of painting. The girl is dressed in a bodice which he often rendered, and she wears on her head just the sort of coif which he painted into a number of his pictures.

The composition is daring and original. It is interesting to note the large size of the soldier's head in relation to that of the girl, showing

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

how close to his subject Vermeer was accustomed to sit.

And yet one does not feel that this is one of Vermeer's best pictures. The blacks seem exaggerated in their blackness, and many of the shadows are too dark. Indeed, one feels a depressing sense of blackness all through the picture, and the colour values are not so good as in many of our artist's works.

It is interesting, of course, to study the map, which is done in that astonishing detail which Vermeer knew so well how to obtain. Yet even the map is not so good as, let us say, that in the *Studio*, where the light slides over its surface in so wonderful a way. Here the effect of light is hardly as good. One feels the local tone of the blacks coming out too strongly.

It is interesting to note that the perspective of the window gives still another proof of the fact that Vermeer was accustomed to work at his canvas sitting down.

### LADY WITH LUTE

Collection of Mrs. Henry E. Huntington, New York

A young woman holding a lute sits facing the spectator, her head turned somewhat to the left.

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

She is dressed in a yellow jacket trimmed with ermine. On the table before her is a blue striped cover on which are two music books. In front of the table is a chair on which some blackish-blue drapery is thrown. At the back, towards the left, against the wall is another chair, and above this hangs a map. The picture is lit by a window at the left, over which hangs a blue curtain.

Signed on the wall beneath the table: "Meer."

Canvas,  $20\frac{5}{8}$  inches by  $18\frac{1}{8}$  inches.

From an English collection.

The design of this picture, especially the spacing, is excellent, very characteristic of Vermeer and yet differing from his other compositions. The figure is placed more toward the window than is usual and there is more space on the further side. An interesting peculiarity in the design, very characteristic of Vermeer — a peculiarity which also occurs in the *Woman at a Casement* — is that he brings the shape of the end of the map-stick close against the woman's head, almost touching it.

In modern design it is almost an axiom that two marked forms in different planes of the composition should either overlap or be quite widely

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

separated. Bringing them close together as Vermeer has done is often spoken of to students as a fault. Yet Vermeer does it successfully. It may be one of those things like the prejudice against consecutive fifths among musicians which has no particular foundation. One would guess from the technique—from the likeness in manner of the design and from the particular way in which the window is arranged—that this picture was painted about the same time as the Berlin *Pearl Necklace* and the *Woman at a Casement* and the National Gallery *Lady at the Virginals*.

### A GIRL ASLEEP

Collection of the late Benjamin Altman

A young woman, sitting quite to the left of the canvas and facing the spectator, leans her head on her right hand, her elbow resting on the table before her: her left hand touches the table. She wears a curious, pointed black cap and a brown bodice with white collar over which is thrown a white kerchief. The table is covered with a crumpled Turkish rug, on which are a dish of fruit, a cloth, and the little white jug which often appears in Vermeer's compositions. Behind the girl, on

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

The wall, is a part of a picture which also appears in the *Lady at the Virginals* of the National Gallery and in one belonging to Mr. H. C. Frick. To the right of this is seen an open door which opens into another room where there is a table and a picture on the wall. This further room is an interesting detail, since it is the only instance of this sort in Vermeer's work, although quite common with De Hooch. On the wall, near the door-jamb, is seen part of a map. Part of a lion-headed chair fills in the foreground to the extreme right.

Signed to the left, above the girl's head, "J. V. Meer" (the V and M intertwined).

Canvas, 34 inches by 29½ inches.

Most probably the *Drunken Servant Girl Sleeping by a Table* of the 1696 Sale. Bürger-Thoré supposed that he had refound this in a picture he owned which is now in the Widener Collection, Philadelphia.

The above picture was in the Collection of John W. Wilson, Paris, 1881. In the possession of the dealer, M. Sedelmeyer, Paris, 1898. In the Collection of the late Rodolphe Kann, Paris. Purchased by Duveen Bros., London, 1907.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

Certain artists are so displeased by the heavy technique and colour of this that they do not think it a Vermeer at all. It is evident, however, that it must either be a Vermeer or an imitation of one. And it does not seem likely that a plagiarist would have allowed himself such a different scheme of composition or design as here appears. He would hardly have opened the door into the other room, and more likely would have tried more for the Vermeer quality of colour-tone. In other words, the picture's very unlikeness to the best Vermeers is one of the things which leads one to believe that it is not an effort at forgery. Moreover, the quality of the paint appears old, and certainly it was not worth while to attempt a forgery of Vermeer until within comparatively recent years.

One is a little disappointed at first sight of the original of this picture, because the tonality is not so beautiful as in many of Vermeer's works. It is, indeed, a trifle heavy and hot, and the manner of painting is rather more heavy-handed than in Vermeer's very best period. This, together with its size, leads one to place the time of its painting before the conversation-pieces and the portraits, but after such pictures as the *Courtesan*, the *Toilet*

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

of *Diana, Mary and Martha, the Milkwoman, the View of Delft, and the Street in Delft*, which, from their manner of painting, would seem to be comparatively early. A number of the stigmata of his later work appear in this picture—the lion-headed chair, the little white jug, the end of the map roller, the picture with the Cupid, and the crumpled Oriental rug—so that one would judge that the picture must have been painted at a time not far removed from the rest of these. Yet from the internal evidence of heavy technique and rather hot colour one guesses that this may have been among the first of such a series.

In looking very carefully over details one finds many things both good and bad which are instructive. The whitish wall, to begin with, is very beautiful in its graduations—indeed quite marvellous. And so also is the wall of the back room. The jug, as is usual with Vermeer's still-life, is very good, but the half lights are too hot. The dish on the table is wonderful in painting. On the other hand, the fruit is not so good. The cloth is bad. The glass looks like lace. Characteristically of Vermeer the fringe of the rug, quite at the outside of the picture, is painted with singular felicity; indeed the whole rug is beautifully



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

done. As to the head the nose is well painted and the mouth is excellently made. Unfortunately the high-lights are wrong—the high-light on the cheek especially being too high. The planes, however, seem carefully studied. The hand is rather good.

The picture as a whole seems richer in tone—heavier, and “fatter,” as artists say, in paint quality—than are many of Vermeer’s pictures. At the same time it gives one the impression that it has been over-cleaned.

### A YOUNG GIRL WITH A FLUTE

In the possession of Knoedler and Company

A young girl sits facing the spectator; she leans slightly to her left. In her left hand is a yellow flute. On her head is a curious hat of pyramidal shape, striped with brown, yellowish-grey, and white. She wears a greyish-blue bodice with white cuffs and stomacher; about her neck is a white kerchief. The chair she sits in is decorated with the well-known lion’s head. The background is a piece of tapestry, of a large design, in brown, greenish-grey, and dark blue.

Oak panel, 8 inches by 7 inches.



*The Young Girl*

## A YOUNG GIRL WITH A FLUTE

IN POSSESSION OF M. KNOLLER AND COMPANY, NEW  
YORK, LONDON AND PARIS



## VERMEER'S PICTURES

Discovered by Dr. Bredius in 1906. Exhibited on loan at the Royal Picture Gallery, The Hague.

Later in the Collection of Jonkheer de Grez, Brussels.

This painting is apparently a start. Curiously enough, when one considers it is by Vermeer the picture is rather hot in colour. This comes from its being painted on a mahogany panel the colour of which has "come through."

### WOMAN WEIGHING GOLD

Collection of P. A. B. Widener, Philadelphia

A lady stands near an open window weighing gold, or it may be that she is testing the weights of her scales in order shortly to weigh some pearls that lie nearby. Hence the picture is sometimes called *A Woman Weighing Pearls*. She wears a dark blue jacket trimmed with ermine with a red and yellow under-jacket. The table cover is of dark blue and the window curtain an orange yellow. Behind her hangs a large picture apparently of the *Last Judgment*. The floor is in black and white tiling or marble.

Panel, 16½ inches by 14 inches.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

Sales: Amsterdam, 1696; Amsterdam, 1701; Nieuhof, Amsterdam, 1777; Munich, 1826; Casimir-Périer, London, 1848; bought in by M. Casimir-Périer, Jr.

This particular sort of composition was a favourite one with Vermeer, and is indeed the typical one by which one would indicate him in a *pastiche* or a caricature. One need hardly point out that he tried the same general arrangement no less than four times: to wit, in the *Reader* of the Dresden Gallery, the *Woman Reading* in the Rijks Museum, the *Pearl Necklace* of the Berlin Gallery, and in the one now under discussion. This latter most resembles the Berlin example both in placement on the canvas and in technique; so that one is perhaps justified in supposing that it was painted at about the same time.

The lady in the picture represents an older and it may be a more distinguished type than does the Berlin example; indeed, one does not remember to have seen just this type in any of Vermeer's other works.

Not only is this painting very typical of Vermeer in arrangement but in colour as well. The picture with its insistence on blue and yellow notes, its larger secondary masses of white and of black,

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

is very characteristic of Vermeer. And while certain others of the Delft School, noticeably Willem Kalf, the still-life painter, delighted in arrangements in which yellow and blue were predominant, they did not paint the figure with Vermeer's skill.

This picture evidently was highly esteemed in Vermeer's day. The fact that in the 1696 Sale it is described as being in a "case" — which was probably one of those folding frames or shrines which were not uncommon in those days — shows that it was considered a fine thing. The price, too, 155 gulden or florins, shows that it was highly valued. In this sale only the *Milkwoman*, 175 florins, and the *View of Delft*, 200 florins, realised more than this particular picture. Curiously enough, the *Lady Adorning Herself* — supposed to be the *Pearl Necklace* now in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, a picture at least as fine — only brought 30 florins.

### GIRL WITH MANDOLIN

Collection of John G. Johnson, Philadelphia

A young girl, sitting to the left of the picture and fronting the spectator, is playing a mandolin.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

Her smiling face is turned to her right. She is dressed in a yellow jacket trimmed with ermine; her skirt is of white satin. Behind her hangs a landscape in a gold frame. On the right behind is a table with a blue cover.

Signed in full.

Canvas,  $19\frac{1}{2}$  inches by  $16\frac{1}{2}$  inches, H. d. G. In Dr. Valentiner's Hudson-Fulton Catalogue size is given  $20\frac{1}{4}$  inches by 17 inches.

Probably the *Young Woman Playing the Guitar* of the 1696 Sale. Formerly belonged to M. de Gruyter, Amsterdam, then to the Cremer Collection, Brussels, to Lord Iveagh's Collection, and afterwards to the Bisschoffsheim Collection, London.

The picture is supposed to be one of two (*The Love-Letter* of the Beit Collection being the other) with which Vermeer's widow redeemed a debt of 617 florins after his death.

This painting has a more sketchy appearance than do most of Vermeer's. Many things in it seem slightly done; and as Vermeer's peculiar excellence was his manner of carrying every detail to its farthest point, the difference of this picture from the rest is indeed marked. One gets



*Giov. Batt.*

A LADY PLAYING THE GUITAR

COLLECTION OF JOHN G. JOHNSON, PHILADELPHIA





## VERMEER'S PICTURES

the idea, in looking the picture over carefully, that the artist—as even the best of painters sometimes do—made a poor start and decided to abandon this particular picture and so left it unfinished. There are excellent bits in the painting: the picture on the wall, the wall itself, the mandolin, — all are painted with a marked degree of skill and a sense of the relation of things.

On the other hand, the face seems quite badly made. The eyes, which Vermeer sometimes made so beautifully, are rather clumsily roughed-in, so that one cannot avoid the impression that he meant to go on further with them. Something the same might be said of the manner in which the mouth is indicated.

The light and shade on the forehead and on the cheek are hardly so well understood as in some of Vermeer's very finest performances.

Apart from certain felicities in the rendering of still-life, what really makes the picture worth while is the placing or setting of the picture on the canvas. The picture is well composed, not so remarkable in design as are some of his pictures, but distinctly agreeable and original in its placement. One says original because, while compared

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

to modern paintings it may not seem particularly so, it is, compared to the pictures of Vermeer's time, quite original in its setting.

### ENGLAND

#### A YOUNG LADY AT THE VIRGINALS

National Gallery, London

A young woman, standing in profile in the precise middle of the picture, looks over her right shoulder at the spectator. Her two hands lightly touch the keys of a pair of virginals, before which she stands. She is richly dressed in a blue silk bodice over which a sort of mantle trimmed with lace appears, and she has a string of pearls about her neck. Her skirt is of white satin. The virginals, severe in line, show the inside of the cover decorated with a landscape in the Italianate manner. On the wall, behind the lady, is a picture of Cupid, who seems to be holding up the lucky number. The frame is black. To the left of this hangs a smaller picture, a landscape in an ornate gold frame. The light comes through a leaded window, as usual at the extreme left of the composition; there is a curtain above this. The floor

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

is of tessellated pavement in black and white. The wall is of the usual nondescript Vermeer colour, and Delft tiles form a sort of baseboard. Telling against these at the extreme right and quite in the foreground stands a chair upholstered in blue velvet.

Signed "J. v. Meer" (the J and M intertwined).

Canvas, 20 inches by 18 inches.

Possibly the *Lady Playing a Spinnet* of the Sale of 1696.

Has belonged to the Danser-Nyman Collection; to the Solly Collection of London; to Bürger-Thoré and later to Madame Lacroix at Paris. Bought for the National Gallery in 1892 by Lawrie and Co., from the Bürger-Thoré Sale, Paris, December 5, 1892.

Although this picture is very fine in design and space filling, it cannot be denied that one's first sight of the original is a decided shock. Presumably the painting was originally of the full colour of nature. But, apparently through over-cleaning, it has acquired a greenish tone which is most unpleasant. It has been, to use the artist's term, "skinned." It has been suggested

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

that Vermeer sometimes painted his pictures on a bluish ground, possibly using glazes — yellow lake and the like. If these faded or were rubbed off, the result would undoubtedly be much like the present picture. There is altogether too much cleaning of pictures. Very few men are competent to clean an old master properly, and those are apt to be among the most cautious of cleaners. It is sickening to think how quickly and easily a rash intruding “expert” may ruin the work of a great master.

Technically, this picture is among the most skilful of Vermeer’s work. He has quite overcome the rather stodgy handling of his youth, and everything is here made crisply and neatly perhaps too much so, for one somehow gets the idea that he meant to work over the thing and bring it together; or perhaps the lost glazes supplied just that *ensemble*.

The satin skirt is painted with surprising skill. Indeed there is no place where he falters as in some of his other pictures, unless it be in the ridiculous curls that adorn the forehead of the lady. Even here one feels that our artist was more or less the victim of a foolish style.

**JAN VERMEER OF DELFT**  
**A YOUNG LADY AT THE VIRGINALS**  
**NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON**









## VERMEER'S PICTURES

### A YOUNG LADY SEATED AT THE SPINET

National Gallery, London

A young girl in blue sits facing a marbled spinet on the left of the picture. Her hands touch the keys, and her head is turned toward the spectator. On the inside of the piano cover which is thrown backward, is a landscape. In the extreme foreground to the left is a 'cello, partly cut off by the side and lower lines of the picture. A large tapestry curtain, of the sort that often appears in Vermeer's later pictures, somewhat obscures the light from the window at the left. A big picture containing three figures hangs behind the girl's head. Delft tiles form a baseboard to the wall. The floor is in black and white squares.

Signed on wall to right of girl's head, "J. v. Meer" (the J and M intertwined).

Canvas, 20 inches by 17½ inches.

Possibly No. 37 of the 1696 Sale. Sold from the Pommersfelden Gallery, Paris, 1867; later at the Bürger-Thoré Sale, Paris, 1892, for 25,000 francs (\$5000). Was in the Collection of George Salting.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

There are many paintings by Vermeer that have more of charm or artistry than this, but it is interesting from the extreme ease and skilful freedom of its technique. It has, indeed, in this sense the defects of its qualities. Everything has gone so easily that Vermeer does not seem to have been tempted to work over it, so that the picture lacks a little in quality. The drapery, for instance, is done with notable ease and freedom. The artist does not seem to have had any of his former difficulties and fumbings; the thing is done in a forthright way, as if it were easy.

But from this very ease come certain disadvantages. The drapery is painted too much *en longue*; that is, the touch seems to run too much with the form. One does not get the sense of the light sliding across it so much as in certain others of his works.

On the other hand, the head is painted with a good deal of sophistication, with due regard to the sense of light. Only, one feels this end to be the result of skill rather than that intense and *naïf* observation which has been so often Vermeer's hall-mark. It is interesting to note that the nose is modelled in the same manner as is the

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

*Young Girl* of the Hague Museum. Only the observation is not so close.

The more one looks over this picture the more one feels it to be an extremely skilful performance even for Vermeer. There is no faltering anywhere: merely, one does not feel that the observation of *nuances* is carried so far as in many of his other pictures.

### YOUNG GIRL AT THE SPINET

Collection of the late Alfred Beit, London

A young girl sits at a spinet, which is at the extreme left of the picture. She turns her head in three quarters toward the spectator. Her hands lie on the keys of the spinet. She wears a shawl over a dress of white satin. Only part of the spinet is seen.

Canvas,  $9\frac{1}{2}$  inches by  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

Sale: W. Reyers, Amsterdam, 1714.

### A LOVE-LETTER (also called *Young Lady Writing*)

Collection of the late Alfred Beit, London

A young lady at the right of the composition sits facing the spectator, as she writes a letter. A

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

servant, almost in the middle of the picture, stands with folded hands and looks over her shoulder toward the window. The young lady wears a quaint cap. Her bodice is low cut with short sleeves. The picture is lighted by a stained glass window at the left. Part of this window is covered by a thin curtain, the upper part of which is irradiated with translucent light. A large portière at the extreme left obscures part of the window. On the wall, behind both figures, hangs a very large picture which seems to represent the Finding of Moses. The wall itself is of a discreet grey.

The table is covered with the usual Vermeer rug of reddish hue. A chair covered with velvet fills in the foreground of the right-hand corner. The floor is in black and white marble pavement.

Signed on a sheet of paper hanging from the table in shadow, "J. v. Meer" (the J and M intertwined).

Canvas, 27½ inches by 23 inches.

Given in security for a debt, together with the *Lady Playing a Guitar* by Catharina Bolnes, for 617 florins (\$246).

Bleiswijck Collection, Delft. Collection of Hendrik van Slingeland, the Hague, 1752. Collec-

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

tion of Muller van Aichholz, Vienna, Secretan Sale, Paris, 1889. In the Marinoni Collection, Paris. In the Collection of the late Alfred Beit, London.

The noticeable thing about this picture is that the *chiaroscuro* is more marked in effect than in many of Vermeer's paintings. It is, in short, more Rembrandtesque in effect, though certainly the technique is unlike him. The reflected lights are less marked, and the picture depends less for its composition on linear design than do many of our painter's pictures. On the other hand, its effectiveness in light and dark masses is largely gained by *chiaroscuro* — much more, as we have said, than in much of Vermeer's work.

It is one of the most complete technical performances of the artist that we have. There are really no weak places in it, and the picture is "fatter" — as artists say — in paint quality than are some of Vermeer's.

### LADY AND GENTLEMAN AT A SPINET (or The Music Lesson)

Windsor Castle, England

At the further end of a large room, somewhat to the right of the canvas, stand a lady and a

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

gentleman. The woman, whose back is turned to the spectator, touches the piano. The man, standing in profile something to the right, regards the lady attentively. The spinet is of very ornate design, the cover being raised. Behind it hangs a mirror which reflects the head and shoulders of the young woman. The light of the room comes through quaint windows of leaded glass, very much to the left. The floor is in tessellated marbles of black and white. In the extreme foreground at the right-hand side of the picture is a table covered by the well-known Oriental rug. On this is a salver which carries the little white jug which appears in so many Vermeers. Somewhat behind and to the left of these, directly in front of the young lady, stands a chair studded with brass nails, while a violoncello lies near by upon the floor.

Canvas, 29 inches by 25 inches.

Exhibited at the Royal Academy, Winter Exhibition, 1876, and at the London Guildhall, 1895.

Many artists consider this picture to be the finest in design of any that Vermeer has made. It certainly is one of his best designs, and it may be said for it that its pattern is not quite so obvious as it is in several of his other beautiful compositions.



*Jan Vermeer of Delft*

LADY AT THE VIRGINALS AND A GENTLEMAN

ROYAL COLLECTION, WINDSOR CASTLE





## VERMEER'S PICTURES

The uninitiate might regard it as merely a man and a woman standing rather far back in a room. But when one comes to look the thing over and to study it carefully, one discovers that there is not an inch in the design which is not carefully dovetailed into the next bit.

Note the way in which the gallant's shoulder comes against the picture behind him; how beautifully his head and shoulders fill the wall space behind him; the manner in which his loose cuff fills the space from the coat to the spinet. Observe how the woman's head just breaks the short upper line of the spinet cover; and how her sleeve comes at precisely the right place in relation to the keyboard; how the panier of her dress cuts the lower line of the spinet in just the right manner. The picture is full of such felicities as these, and it is the sum total of just such things that makes the design so beautiful.

This picture is supposed to be No. 6 of the 1696 Sale, and very possibly it is so. It is difficult to believe, however, that even at that time so large a picture of so high a degree of finish should have sold for 95 florins, when a picture hardly more than a sketch like the *Lady with a Guitar* sold for 70 florins.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

### CHRIST AT THE HOUSE OF MARTHA AND MARY

Coats Collection, Skalmorlie Castle, Scotland

The figure of Christ, which is life size, sits in profile to the right of the canvas. He looks up at Martha, who leans toward Him with a basket, in which is seen a loaf of bread. His left hand hangs over the arm of His chair. His right hand is pointed toward Mary, who sits at His feet in the lower left-hand foreground of the picture. He is clad in a dull blue garment. Martha wears a curious yellow kerchief. Her bodice is a yellow check with red border; her arms are covered by white sleeves. Mary has a parti-coloured cloth of white and red on her head and shoulders. She is dressed in blue and red. Her head is relieved against a white table-cloth. Behind her shows an Oriental rug which seems to be the under-cloth of the table. One can trace the *pintimento* of the right hand of Christ originally in a slightly different position.

Signed on the bench on which Mary sits, "V. Meer."

Formerly in possession of the dealers, Forbes and Paterson, London, 1901.

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

While this picture is by no means among the most beautiful of Vermeer's productions it has for us a certain interest as being apparently one of his earliest pictures, and also because it is life size. It is the only one besides *The Courtesan* which the artist made so large. It would seem as if his early practice in painting large canvases had made him treat smaller ones in a larger manner than did some of the other painters of little conversation-pieces. It is rather heavily painted with a full flowing brush which is managed with a hand, that, for Vermeer, seems rather clumsy. The finest thing about it is the light and shade.

### HOLLAND

#### **A GIRL READING A LETTER (sometimes called *The Reader*)**

Rijks Museum, Amsterdam

A young woman stands in the middle of the picture, facing toward the left. She wears a light blue silk dressing sacque with a whitish skirt. She is reading a letter held in both hands.

In front of her is a table on which are a crumpled rug and a parchment-covered book. Behind this table is a chair on which appear the lions'

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

heads. Behind her on a wall of Vermeer grey hangs a large map. In the immediate foreground at the extreme right is another chair.

The whole picture is lighted by a window, divined rather than seen, to the left.

Canvas, 19½ inches by 16 inches.

Sales: Ten Kate, Amsterdam, 1801. Paris, 1809. Lapeyrière, Paris, 1825. Sommariva, Paris, 1839. Was in the Van der Hoop Collection, Amsterdam.

Perhaps no picture is more thoroughly characteristic of Vermeer than is this. In arrangement, in colour, and in technique it tells of his handiwork. The arrangement, while apparently something like the *Pearl Necklace* of the Berlin Museum and the *Girl Reading* of the Dresden Gallery, is, in reality, subtly different.

The window is left out; as far as one remembers it is the only one of Vermeer's genre pictures in which this happens. One divines its presence beyond the picture by the beautiful sense of light which irradiates the canvas.

In no picture has he been more successful in suggesting the sense of light sliding across the wall and the map. The map, in short, is one of

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

his masterpieces, as fine in its way as the map in the *Studio* of the Czernin Collection.

The whole thing is extremely well spaced, and the arrangement of light and dark masses—the “*notan*,” of which we have already spoken—is particularly good and effective. Note especially the way in which the chair, placed in the right foreground, breaks the upright line of the side of the picture and fills in the lower part connecting with the skirt.

The study of edges throughout is remarkable.

An admirable bit, small in itself, but very important from its relation to the whole, is the knob of the map-stick. It is wonderfully studied and finished and yet takes its place perfectly well. This is one of those little mysteries of which Vermeer had the copyright.

The curious dark mark against the woman's cheek is apparently the suggestion of a black ribbon fastened at the side of the hair.

It is a curious instance of the admiration of artists for Vermeer, that even so advanced a type as Vincent Van Gogh, the so-called Post-Impressionist, spoke well of him. In his “Letters,” as we have seen, he says, on page 62, “Do you know a painter called Jan van der Meer? He painted a

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

very distinguished and beautiful Dutch woman, in pregnancy. The scale of colours of this strange artist consists of blue, lemon-yellow, pearl-grey, black, and white. It is true in the few pictures he painted the whole range of his palette is to be found; but it is just as characteristic of him to place lemon-yellow, dull blue, and light grey together, as it is of Velasquez to harmonise black, white, grey, and pink. . . . The Dutchmen had no imagination, but they had tremendous taste and an unerring sense of composition."

### A MAID-SERVANT POURING OUT MILK

Rijks Museum, Amsterdam

A young woman stands at a table pouring some milk from a jug into a mug or bowl. She wears a white kerchief and is dressed in a bodice and skirt. On the green-covered table is a basket with bread; bread also lies on the table. Behind the basket stands a covered pitcher. The light comes from a window to the left high up in the composition. A basket and a brass utensil hang beyond it; above these, at the extreme upper part of the canvas, hangs a small pitcher. The wall is quite blank save for two nails, painted with meticulous

**JAN VERMEER OF DELFT**  
**A GIRL READING A LETTER**  
**Rijks Museum, AMSTERDAM**









## VERMEER'S PICTURES

care. On the floor at the right and behind the woman's figure is a wooden foot-warmer. Tiles form a sort of baseboard to the wall.

Signed, "J. V. Meer" (the J and M intertwined).

Canvas, 18 inches by 16½ inches.

Sale of 1696, 175 florins (\$60); in 1701, 320 florins (\$128); Van Hoek Sale, 1719, 126 florins (\$49.40); Neuville Sale, 1765, 560 florins (\$224); De Bruyn Sale, 1799, 1550 florins (\$720). Sold in 1813 for 2113 florins (\$846). Bought in 1907 for the Rijks Museum of M. Six van Vromade, together with thirty-eight other pictures, for 750,000 florins. It was then considered to be worth nearly half this sum, possibly 300,000 florins (\$120,000).

The *Milk-woman* is one of the few paintings that have always been known and accredited to Vermeer. In Sir Joshua Reynolds' diary of a "Journey in Holland" he speaks of seeing this picture when at Amsterdam. It is apparently one of Vermeer's earlier paintings: the *facture* is rather heavy and loaded, and little things, like the woman's kerchief, are not done so skilfully as in pictures of a later date. While it is a fine painting, it can hardly be ranked among the half-dozen very great ones of Vermeer. Still there is a

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

Millet-like solidity and firmness about this figure — a Biblical simplicity — that is very fine. The thing exists; the light and shade, well and simply rendered, gives one the illusion of solidity.

### THE LOVE-LETTER

Rijks Museum, Amsterdam

Through an open door the seated figure of a lady is seen; her body is facing the spectator, but her head turns sharply to her right. In her right hand she holds a letter, which has just been handed to her by a smiling maid-servant. In her left hand she holds the handle of a lute. She is dressed in a jacket trimmed with ermine; her skirt is of silk. About her neck are pearls, and pearls are in her hair. The maid-servant stands to her right, somewhat behind, looking down at her mistress. Her left arm is akimbo while her right hand is at her side. Nearby stands a scrap-basket, and a cushion box, apparently the same one which appears in the *Lace-Maker*, is in front, with strands of coloured silks issuing from it. Behind the lady, on the wall, is some gilt Spanish leather, while two pictures hang above it. Somewhat to the left is a mantelpiece with col-

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

umns. The foreground is filled in to the right by a large Gobelins tapestry which is draped above and at the side of the door. In front of this appears a chair in which are some sheets of music. At the other side of the door hangs, in sharp perspective, a map. The floor is in black and white squares. A pair of wooden shoes and a long-handled brush fill in the front.

Signed on the wall above the basket work, "J. V. Meer" (the J and M intertwined).

Canvas, 17½ inches by 15 inches.

Possibly the picture of the 1696 Sale, *A Lady to whom a Maid-Servant is bringing a Letter*, which sold for 70 florins (\$28). Bought by the State for 45,000 florins (\$18,000).

One does not get a very good idea of this picture from the photographic reproductions, because they bring out the foreground too light and too much in detail. One's eye really focusses at once on the figure of the lady with the letter, and one is but dimly aware of the chair and accessories in the foreground, which appear darker and vaguer than in the reproduction.

Apparently this picture was painted rather late in Vermeer's life — one would guess at about the

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

time of the Czernin Gallery *Studio*. One gets this idea from the technical perfection of certain bits, like the tessellated flooring and the mantel behind the lady's hand. It is true that the servant is not very well done—but the lady's head, though "queer," is yet an admirable piece of light and shade. This is, indeed, the reason for its unexpected appearance—for there is nothing so strange as humanity when viewed freshly and without prejudice. Vermeer saw and rendered this head with the same uncompromising directness and aloofness with which he saw and rendered the scrap-basket. Apparently one meant as little to him as the other, except that the head, being the focussing point, is more closely rendered in detail. This aloofness of sympathy is often to be noted in great artists: one sees the same thing in Velasquez and in Veronese. The piece of Spanish leather behind the figures is worthy of note because it is mentioned in an inventory of Vermeer's effects, made after his death, and is, indeed, one of the many points by which this picture is identified as a Vermeer.

The aforesaid scrap-basket, by the way, is a remarkable piece of painting: made with perfect

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

ease out of soft flowing pigment, the aspect rendered supremely well and yet with distinct economy of effort.

### STREET IN DELFT

Six Collection, Amsterdam

The façade of a three-storied brick house. At the open door of the house sits a woman sewing. There are two children playing in front of the house. Through a doorway looking into a court-yard is seen the figure of a woman at a wash-tub. Another closed doorway is seen to the left of this, and by its side appears a smaller house covered for the most part with ivy. The lower parts of all the windows, save one of the larger house, are closed by shutters. The windows to be seen are small and leaded. The outline of the house, of irregular design, shows two chimneys. The sky is grey with cumulus clouds. The street in front is paved with square cobblestones.

Canvas, 21 inches by 17 inches.

Apparently the *House in Delft* sold for 72 florins (\$28.80) in 1696. It belonged to the Collection of M. G. W. Oosten de Bruyn. In the Van



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

Winter Collection, Amsterdam. Now in the Collection of J. Six, Amsterdam.

This picture seems to have been painted at about the same time as the *View of Delft* and the *Milk-woman*, if one may judge by its technique or manner of painting. It is, however, smoother in surface than the *Milk-woman*, which is one of the most "loaded" of Vermeer's canvases. There are many things in it which remind one of De Hooch, but the signature on the left-hand wall, I. v. Meer, seems to settle the question of authorship. It does not seem likely that the signature was forged, since, till very lately, the name of De Hooch was a better asset than that of Vermeer.

Apart from the merits of the painting, there is something very delightful about this old Dutch house with its mixture of neatness and squalor. One notes, for instance, how the whitewash or stucco goes up beyond the door just as the careless workmen happened to plaster it on. The leaded panes are delightful, and one observes with interest how our artist has managed to render literally every brick in the building without any apparent loss of effectiveness in his picture.

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

The fact is, that when a design is strongly conceived and mapped out in broad oppositions of light and dark, no amount of detail will injure its effectiveness.

The little figures in this composition suggest De Hooch more than Vermeer. They are well enough done not to spoil the effect of the picture, but they seem hardly so neat in *facture* as are most of Vermeer's figures.

### VIEW OF DELFT FROM THE ROTTERDAM CANAL

Royal Picture Gallery, The Hague

The town of Delft is to be seen across the canal. Most noticeable is the Nieuwe Kerk, of handsome Gothic design. A mass of trees, very *pointillé* in style, is to be seen in front of the church, and before the trees appears a small bridge with an arch. In front and to the right of the church is seen an old house which joins on to the old city wall. Further to the right two towers rise from the wall above the Rotterdam Gate, and in front of this is a large canal-boat. To the left of the bridge appears a large building which has a cupola or "gazebo," under which may be seen the Schiedam Gate. Still further to the left are

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

the roofs of many houses whose walls are for the most part hidden by a high wall. In front of these, along the dyke, lie various canal-boats.

In the immediate foreground, on the bank, are seen, rather to the left, two marketwomen talking together. At the extreme left stands a group of two men, a woman and another woman who holds a child in her arms. The sky is filled with large cumulus clouds with spaces of very blue sky between.

Signed on the boat to the left, "J. v. M" (the letters intertwined).

Canvas, 39 inches by 46½ inches.

Sales: Amsterdam, 1696.

S. J. Stinstra, Amsterdam, 1822.

The tones are painted quite frankly as they appeared — blue is blue; green, green; even red, red — for Vermeer, unlike many moderns, had no particular *parti-pris* about the matter of outdoor colour. He simply, as well as he might, painted the thing before him as it appeared, with no preoccupation about how Rembrandt or Ruysdael might have done it. One gets a distinct feeling, in looking at Ruysdael's or at Hobbema's pictures, that they were made from very carefully

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

studied pencil drawings. In regard to this picture one's feeling is quite different. It is impossible to conceive of it as having been done otherwise than directly before nature. And if this be so, apparently Vermeer was almost the only Dutchman who painted outdoors in that manner. For we find in a poetaster artist's rhymed instructions to young artists the advice to go out and look at nature — make sketches — but to paint the picture in the studio.

One gets a feeling, in studying this picture, that it may have been a *pièce de résistance* that Vermeer took out every now and then and painted away at. It looks as if it might have been worked at for years and years. Unfortunately, one cannot make out all the detail in a photogravure, but if one studies in the original the spire of the church, let us say, the Nieuwe Kerk, one perceives in that little bit material for days and days of work. Bürger-Thoré speaks of the largeness of the picture's *facture*; and it is perfectly true that the general effect is simple and impressive, but the thing is made in the utmost detail. Vermeer has managed to make us focus at the church and the trees in front; that is the place to which one's eye wanders most frequently. One gets the

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

feeling that the foreground with its little figures is not so well or so carefully made. This was very possibly intentional in order to make one focus on the middle distance. It is interesting in this connection to compare the picture with Velasquez' little *View of Saragossa*, where the figures are so astonishingly well made that one takes a quite secondary interest in the town beyond. It is also interesting to note that the men who were perhaps the two greatest objective painters the world has known, should have chosen so nearly the same sort of subject for a landscape exercise — a subject, moreover, quite removed from the ordinary landscape motive.

The background in this *View of Delft* is quite modern looking with its sky of a frank blue and grey-white clouds. It seems as if a Dutch painter had for once taken his yellow glasses off and painted Nature just as she looked. The general tone of the houses is red — naturally enough, since they are for the most part of brick — but the trees are not only green, but in some part of a bluish tinge, quite different from the black affairs which Ruysdael and Hobbema were painting at a time not far removed.

In fact, the great interest of this picture, apart

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

from its intrinsic merit, is that it is the first landscape made in the modern spirit. Though infinitely more studied in detail, it is still got at in much the same feeling that the modern landscapist shows in his approach to nature.

M. Gustave Vanzype describes another *View of Delft*, owned by M. Michel Van Gelder of Uccle, a town near Brussels; and he also publishes a half-tone print of the same. He thinks that this picture may also be by Vermeer. It has almost the same aspect as the Hague example, except it is smaller and is not so wide, leaving out certain of the houses on the left.

Bürger-Thoré mentions a copy of the *View of Delft* made by a Dutch painter at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is possible that the Van Gelder example may be the same picture. It is also known that a number of other copies have been made of this picture. There also exists a so-called *Study* for the picture at the Städel Institute, Frankfort-on-the-Main.

This shows that plenty of copies are in existence. The Van Gelder picture, if a copy, is quite slavishly performed, except that the sky is distinctly different. There are also slight changes in the composition. These are, however, changes

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

which would have been easy to make, and we know it was not uncommon with ancient copyists to take liberties with the pictures they copied. But what rather staggers one's theory that this may be a copy is that the sky is quite different, particularly in the shape and arrangement of the clouds. It is difficult to see how a mere copyist could have ordered the thing so skilfully.

At the same time it would seem absurd that Vermeer should have made so elaborate a study for a thing which, after all, is in itself a study.

The *View of Delft* looks like a canvas that Vermeer may have painted at possibly for several years, to amuse himself. Why, then, make an elaborate preparatory study for that sort of thing?

M. Vanzype himself admits that the trees are of a less bluish (*bleuté*) green in the Van Gelder example; also that the Hague picture has a more marked *patina* of age. These things lead one to doubt the former's authenticity.

### PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG GIRL

Royal Picture Gallery, The Hague

A young girl looks over her left shoulder at the spectator. She wears a curious turban of blue on

**JAN VERMEER OF DELFT**  
**PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG GIRL**  
**ROYAL PICTURE GALLERY, THE HAGUE**









## VERMEER'S PICTURES

her head with a sort of scarf of blue and yellowish-white hanging over the shoulder. There is a large pearl pendant at the ear. The dress is of yellowish-green.

Signed in the left-hand upper corner, "J. V. Meer" (the J, V, and M intertwined).

The canvas is 18½ inches by 16 inches.

Probably the *Portrait in Antique Costume* of the 1696 Amsterdam Sale, where it went for 36 florins (\$14.40). Two other portraits of somewhat the same nature are mentioned. One is in the Arenberg Gallery, while the other has disappeared. The one of which we are speaking was in the Des Tombes Sale. It was bequeathed to the Hague Museum.

Something has been said in a previous chapter of Vermeer's mastery of light and shade; and there is no better instance of this mastery than this head of a *Young Girl* in the Hague Gallery.

There is no other head that one thinks of that is rendered more purely and simply by just light and shade than is this. No painter ever made anything more by simple light and shade than are the eye, the nose, and the mouth of this head. There is nowhere any effort to paint the thing in the direction

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

of the forms. Rather the objects appear to the eye without *parti-pris* or prejudice; it is simply lighter here, darker there, just as the light or the shadow made it. Surely no mouth was ever more beautifully rendered than is this. The thing is made with the most absolute simplicity and yet with the greatest subtlety. There is no painting along the forms of the mouth, nor is there an effort of rendering the texture, the minute cracks in the lip, etc. Simply, the thing is made light where it came light, dark where it was dark. And there is no handling visible — one cannot in any way see how the colour was floated on. The form is simply there, perfectly rendered — the means of its making quite concealed.

The same things might be said of the nose. We are all aware of the nose of commerce — the sort that shows in fashionable portraits with its button-hole nostrils, its over-accented planes, and its sweaty, greasy high light. Here it is made purely by the light and shade — one cannot see the further outline. It simply merges into the light of the cheek as it would appear in nature. On the dark side the form is rendered by the subtlest gradations of half lights. At the same time there is a perfect understanding of where

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

the darkest half-light stops and the no-light or shadow begins.

We can say all these things, too, for the eye. One notes at once that this eye is rendered, not in the button-hole style but purely by light and shade. In the eye there is a complex difficulty of rendering the forms about the iris by light and shade and of rendering the iris itself by colour values. In a previous chapter it has been suggested that one of the modern notes is the way of rendering eyes, and this is a triumphant example of the matter. Here the whole thing—the shape of the upper lid, its turn-under toward the eye, the white of the eye, the upper edge of the lower lid, its turn-under as it runs into the form of the cheek—is made by pure light and shade.

It is not only in the features, but in the way that the light and shade are made on the cheek, that this head is most significant. One notes a strong reflected light on the lower part of the cheek, which carries almost the same value with the light itself. Yet here, as everywhere else, there is not the slightest faltering—just the place where the last ray of direct light stops and the beginning of the shadows, however enfiltrated by reflected light, is definitely ascertained and fixed.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

One does not care quite so much for the light and shade on the quaint kerchief which the girl wears on her head. One feels paint in the rendering — the brush strokes are too obvious. One does not feel that the light and shade are studied in the same wonderful way that distinguishes the face. Doubtless this rougher, more petulant handling was intended to give relief to the face; but one has the feeling that these violent dabs keep the picture from being a perfect whole.

In colour this picture is very characteristic of Vermeer. The famous Vermeer yellow is here, and the equally famous blue. The tonality is very cool, quite unlike the ordinary hot colour that was being made elsewhere in Holland.

Note in parting the marvellously painted ear pendant.

### THE TOILET OF DIANA

Royal Picture Gallery, The Hague

Rather to the right of the picture, in profile, sits the goddess Diana, looking downward on a kneeling nymph who bathes her feet in a small brass dish with a cloth. Diana is dressed in a robe of brown. The maid-servant wears a purple skirt

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

and a brown bodice. By Diana's side, more to the right of the picture, sits another nymph facing in the same direction, who nurses her tired foot with her right hand. She is dressed in a red jacket and a blue skirt.

Rather behind her and still more to the right stands the figure of a young girl who watches the proceedings with interest. Behind Diana, to the left of the canvas, is seen the back of a nymph — partly nude, partly covered with burnt orange drapery; while behind the whole group a grove of trees is seen. In the foreground, to the extreme left, a black and white spaniel watches the sight with sapient interest. Streaks of blue show through the yellow draperies.

Canvas, 39 inches by 42 inches.

Toward the left a doubtful signature, well-nigh effaced, may be seen. The picture was bought for 4725 florins (\$1890) at the Goldschmidt Sale, Paris. It was at first attributed to Nicholas Maes, afterwards to Vermeer of Utrecht; later considered to be by Vermeer of Delft.

Vanzype thinks this a very wonderful picture, and doubtless, when one considers how much better it is than most pictures of the same type



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

done by Dutchmen, it is quite remarkable. But when one looks at it on its own merits and merely tries to think whether it is a fine picture or no, it does not hold its own as well as many of our Vermeers do. Vermeer's *forte* was an exquisite realism; his feet were planted firmly on the tessellated floors he loved so well, and he must have felt ill at ease in striving to paint a picture under unreal conditions. There was the background to be invented, and invention of that sort was not in Vermeer's line.

The painting of the nymph's back is a fine piece of work, no doubt, especially when compared to much of the contemporary work.

What saves this picture is the masterly way in which this back of the standing figure is painted. The picture hardly reminds one of Vermeer in its colouration. The shadows are brownish — and the draperies are orange and pink rather than of the blue and lemon-yellow tones that Vermeer later affected. It looks as if he might have been imitating certain Italian painters. The colour notes somehow suggest Veronese. Not that they are so good as Veronese's colour, but they look as if some one was trying to imitate his way of arranging a colour composition. If Leonard

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

Bramer really were Vermeer's teacher, he may have inspired this spirit of Italianism, which appears in this picture and so far as one knows — with Vermeer — never again. Most of the picture does not suggest Vermeer at all. The trees, for instance, are not in the least in the manner of the trees in the *View of Delft*. They are evidently invented or "faked," and it must be admitted that our Vermeer was a very poor faker. This may, after all, be more praise than blame. The things that look most like the Vermeer whom we know are the hands and feet in various parts and the dog in the corner. This dog and the spindling plant nearby also look more like the work of Fabritius than many of Vermeer's things. In spite of many fine things about the picture I should not be surprised to learn that it was not by Vermeer at all.

Whoever made the picture — were he Vermeer or some one else — had an excellent working idea of light and shade. All the heads are rendered with a thorough understanding of just where the light ends and where the shadow begins. This may seem a simple enough affair, but one constantly sees men and women painting who have no real idea whether the spot they are painting is

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

half light or shadow. In this picture these matters are thoroughly understood. And certainly this understanding of light and shade is one of the most characteristic things about Vermeer. It is one of the qualities which lead to a right understanding of his work.

### THE NEW TESTAMENT

Royal Picture Gallery, The Hague

A woman sits a little to the right of the middle part of the canvas. Her body faces the spectator, while her head is turned in three quarters with the eyes gazing upwards. Her left arm leans on the table to her left, while her right hand lightly touches her breast. The right foot is placed on a large globe. She is dressed in a bluish bodice with a white satin skirt. On the table are an open Bible, a crucifix and a chalice. The table is covered with blue silk. Behind the woman is a large picture of the crucifixion, while behind the crucifix appears a piece of stamped Spanish leather. A curtain or portière of Gobelins tapestry covers the left end of the picture, while a chair, on which is a blue cushion, stands over against it.

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

On the floor, which is made in blue and white squares, lies a snake, its head crushed and bleeding beneath a heavy weight of veined marble. Nearby lies the apple of Paradise. Above the woman, somewhat to her right, hangs a large crystal or glass ball.

Canvas, 45 inches by 35 inches. It was sold in Amsterdam, 1699, for 400 florins (\$160); same place, 1718, for 500 florins (\$200); in 1735, 53 florins (\$21.20); in 1749, together with an Eglon Van der Neer, for 70 florins (\$28). Rediscovered in Berlin by Dr. Bredius. Said to have been sold to him as an Eglon Van der Neer.

In the possession of Dr. A. Bredius, The Hague.

Exhibited on loan at the Royal Picture Gallery.

When Vermeer painted a young girl standing by a window, he was wonderful. When he tried a quasi-allegorical picture, he was hardly so wonderful. In certain ways this picture seems the least good that Vermeer has made. Yet there are beautiful passages in it. Technically, it is among the most accomplished of Vermeer's work. The weak point in it is the figure of the woman. The mere fact that it was supposed to mean some-

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

thing seems to have paralysed Vermeer's energies. It is not only that the figure is stupidly posed and of a ridiculous expression; it is ill done into the bargain.

Here, as so often with bits that could not be got to keep still, Vermeer has had trouble with the drapery. It seems as if he had tried to invent it, and evidently invention in allegorical painting was not Vermeer's *forte*. The invention of the globe as a footstool is as puerile a thing as one has seen in art, though it should be noted at the same time that it is very well painted.

All the accessories, on the other hand, are extremely well done. There is a crucifix near the woman's figure that is a marvel of skill and finish. The picture of the crucifixion itself, which hangs directly behind the woman's figure, is done with consummate art in that it keeps back well and yet allows us to make out the detail in large measure. This, by the way, is characteristic of all Vermeer's paintings of pictures on the wall. They invariably take their place well, and yet one often makes out a considerable amount of detail.

The curtain to the left is extremely well made, and it is this — the manner of its making and its placement — that leads us to believe that the

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

picture must have been painted at a time not far distant from that of the *Studio*. In fact, the device of composition is very much the same in the two pictures: there is the curtain; a chair, in both pictures placed in almost identically the same sense to the picture; there are just the same rafters on the ceiling and the same expedient of a hanging object to break the straight lines of rafters and picture; and the picture is placed in about the same sense as the map and for almost the same purpose.

Indeed, this picture is extremely interesting as showing so sharply on one canvas Vermeer's astounding merits and some of his amiable little weaknesses. There are things in it painted as no one but he ever painted; and then there is this ridiculous female in whom all of Dutch awkwardness is summed up.

Rembrandt sometimes succeeded with this kind of thing because his pictures had a vagueness, a "golden glow" which made them look as if in faëry lands forlorn. But for Vermeer, with his vision and technique, perfectly normal save for its ultra-refinement, a thing had to be good or else it was bad. It was all or nothing. It was but one step for him from the sublime to the ridiculous.

# JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

## GERMANY

### THE PEARL NECKLACE

Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin

A young lady, standing in profile quite at the right of the canvas, looks into a small mirror on the wall at the extreme left. Her hands toy with a pearl necklace. She wears a yellow dressing jacket trimmed with ermine; her skirt is of greenish-grey; a knot of red ribbon adorns her hair, and a large pendant drips from her ear. A table stands somewhat in front of her to the left of the canvas, and on this table is a large blue Japanese vase, a tumbled mass of blue drapery, a small bowl of nondescript colour, and a round brush. Behind the table stands a chair covered with tapestry of greenish hue, modified by designs in dull yellow and blue. Another chair, apparently of brown Spanish leather, with brass bossed nails, stands in the immediate foreground at the extreme right of the canvas. The light comes through a leaded casement quite at the left of the picture; beyond the window is a curtain of Vermeer yellow; the wall is of a whitish-grey.

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

Signed on the table, "J. Meer" (the J and M intertwined).

Canvas, 22 inches by 18 inches.

Probably this is *Lady Adorning Herself* of the 1696 Sale, which sold for 30 florins (\$12). Was in a sale at Amsterdam in 1791. It has, at different times, belonged to the Grevedon Collection, to Bürger-Thoré, and later to the Suermondt Collection.

This is one of the very few almost perfect pictures in the world of which the art is almost concealed. The picture does not appear to be painted at all. It seems to have just happened. There are marvellous bits of rendering — for instance, the jug at the extreme left against the window — but one is not conscious of the handling. The high lights on this vase make one think of one of Alfred Stevens' sayings — that a high light on a jug as made by a Dutch master was more than a clever touch — it was a conscious act of intellect.

What none of the photographs show, or at least what they do not show enough, is the way in which the light slides across the surface of the wall. The figure is really a little more lost in a sort of penumbra — one feels its distance from the win-



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

dow. The lights and darks in this figure do not come out so sharply as in the photographs.

Vermeer in this picture came nearer to making what the simple-minded man in the street would call a pretty face than in anything else he has done. The woman's head is of the marked Dutch type, which has been already pointed out as characteristic of Vermeer as well as of Terburg. Yet here the type is delicately modified: the nose is not so *retroussé*; the chin is not so retreating as with some of Vermeer's women; the arm, though hardly drawn constructively, is well seen and makes an agreeable form; the large pearl ear pendant, which so often appears in Vermeer, is wonderfully painted as usual; and the red ribbon in the hair, made with peculiarly Vermeerish technique, gives an agreeable colour accent.

### A GIRL DRINKING WITH A GENTLEMAN

Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin

A young woman sits in profile toward the right of the canvas facing to the left. She drinks from a wine glass held in her right hand; her left lies in her lap. She wears a red dress and a white cap. A gentleman stands somewhat behind, re-



*Jan Vermeer of Delft*

A GIRL DRINKING WITH A GENTLEMAN  
KAISER FRIDRICH MUSEUM, BERLIN



## VERMEER'S PICTURES

garding her; in his right hand he holds that white jug which often appears in Vermeer's pictures. He is dressed in grey with a black hat. The table is covered with an Oriental rug of various colours. Upon it are certain books and nearby it, in front, is placed a chair with lions' heads. In this chair are a cushion and a guitar.

The stained-glass window, as usual, is on the extreme left of the composition. It has apparently the same design as occurs in the Beit Collection *Love-Letter* and the Brunswick *Coquette*. Beneath the window is a bench, and on the bench is a cushion. Behind the man's figure and to the left is a landscape in a frame of intricate fancy.

Canvas, 26½ inches by 30½ inches.

In the Van Loon Sale, Delft, July 18, 1736. In the Collection of Lord Frances Hope. The collection was purchased as a whole by P. and D. Colnaghi and A. Wertheimer.

This picture might be described as an intermediate Vermeer; that is, it is not so fine as the dozen or so of really great ones, while it is much better than some and is, indeed, a fine picture. If there were nothing else by Vermeer, we might well think it a great picture.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

It is evidently enough by him, although there are places where he falters. We have the lions' heads; the little white vase of so distinctive a shape which often appears in his compositions; and the leaded window of a special design. Then there is the rug or the table and the tessellated flooring, which appears often enough with other artists but almost always with Vermeer.

There is a certain interest in the face of the man because it is of the bilious, saturnine type, with perhaps a touch of Spanish, which is common enough in Holland, but which we of other lands do not associate with her. This man with his rather melancholy, *raffiné* expression might have been the Sebastian Van Storck of Pater's "Imaginary Portrait," just as the stolid girl might have been the hapless Mademoiselle van Westrheene.

To come back to matters technical, it is worthy of note that the drapery on the man's figure is not particularly good. Vermeer experienced here his usual difficulty in rendering forms that would not keep perfectly still. The woman's kerchief is not so good as that of the *Woman at the Casement* in the Metropolitan Museum. On the other hand, there are matchless things in the picture which no one but Vermeer could possibly do: the farther

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

casement, with the light coming through the curtain, is wonderful in its expression of light and shade; the lions' heads, as always, are masterpieces; the head of the mandolin and the rug on the table are done supremely well, in a way that no one else has arrived at. It may be said that these smaller felicities are unimportant. But it is the sum total of all these perfections that gives that air of quiet serenity and stillness which is Vermeer's chiefest charm.

### **THE GIRL WITH THE WINE GLASS (or The Coquette)**

Picture Gallery, Brunswick

A young girl who sits in profile to the right of the canvas turns her smiling face toward the spectator. Her left hand lies in her lap, while her right holds a glass of wine, which a low-bending beau, lightly touching her hand, has just presented her. At a table, toward the left and behind, sits a gloomy gallant who leans his head upon his hand. The girl is clad in a rose-coloured bodice. The short sleeves of yellow shot with gold have lace about the elbows. Her skirt is also of rose-coloured satin. The bending beau sports a mouse-coloured cloak edged with gold

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

lace; his long hair flows to his shoulders over a fine white collar, and his wrists are adorned with flowing laces.

The man in the corner is clad in the military fashion with greyish-green sleeves shot with gold. On the table is a silver salver with lemons, the peel of one tumbling to the table. The little white jug, which often appears in Vermeer's pictures, is here; and a large white napkin falls over the blue table cover.

The half-opened casement of stained glass, which represents a little woman, apparently a madonna, holding a snake, admits a discreet light to the room. The wall, of Vermeer grey, is adorned with a big portrait, which represents a man in black with large white collar and cuffs, holding a Rembrandt hat in his right hand. The floor is tiled in blue and white.

The picture is signed just below the window. "J. Meer" (the J and M intertwined).

Canvas, 31 inches by 27 inches.

Possibly the *Interior with Revellers* of the 1696 Sale. Catalogued by Eberlein so late as 1859, "Jacob Vandermeer." It comes from the old Salthal Collection, made by the Dukes of Brunswick.

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

This picture can hardly be ranked among the very best ones, though it has some admirable passages. Naturally the girl's head is the focussing point; unfortunately this is by no means the finest bit of painting in the picture. The mouth is insensitively done, and the edge of shadow of the nose is poorly studied. The gallant's head, nearby, is one of the most dismal things that our Vermeer ever perpetrated. On the other hand, the girl's hand in her lap is beautifully seen and rendered, as it shows against the white napkin. Whenever Vermeer could get a thing to lie still, as this hand must have lain, he could see it more beautifully and render it more absolutely than any other man has been able to do. So one sees the girl's satin dress is handsomely made: it must have been arranged on a lay figure. The still life, as always with Vermeer, is masterly in its treatment. So is the picture on the wall and the back of the chair, though one might think the chair is poorly placed as a matter of composition. On the other hand, the raised hands, which must have been harder to keep still, are not so well rendered. The hand of the gloomy gallant who sits at the table is indeed singularly bad. He seems to be saying with old George Wither:



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT.

“Will had her to the wine  
He might intreat her.”

Fine *morceaux* in the picture are the bit of shirt on the seated man's arm, the lace chemise about the girl's wrist, and the girl's sleeve, which is all of shot gold wonderfully rendered.

An interesting thing about this picture is that it is built up on a rose-coloured note of colour, whereas most of Vermeer's paintings are notes in blue and yellow.

### STUDY HEAD

Berlin Museum

A boy's head in full face, the light coming from the left. He wears a broad black felt hat and a broad white collar.

Painted in oils on paper.

This is the head described in Dr. H. de Groot's Catalogue, under 46 b.

It is rather hard to see how anyone could ever have supposed this head to be by Vermeer. There is neither the square-touch handling nor yet the small *pointillé* touch which we have come to associate with Vermeer. The high lights on the lips are not at all in his manner. (Compare with



*Jan Vermeer of Delft (Authenticity contested)*

STUDY OF A HEAD  
ROYAL PRINT COLLECTION, BERLIN



## VERMEER'S PICTURES

*Head of Girl*, Hague Museum.) The light and shade are not understood. Note the forehead, where the edge of the shadow is ill studied, the penumbra being of the same value as the shadow. This is a fault which Vermeer never committed. The reflected lights are exaggerated and their edges made too sharp against the dark hat.

The picture seems quite obviously not by Vermeer.

### A LADY AND A MAID-SERVANT

Collection of James Simon, Berlin

A young lady, at the right of the composition, sits at a table; one hand, resting on this table, holds a pen. The other touches her chin as though she were perplexed.

Her head, turned in "lost profile," looks toward a smiling maid-servant who hands her a letter. The young lady is dressed in a lemon-yellow morning sacque trimmed with white ermine. She has pearls in her hair, pearls about her neck, and a large pendant at the ear. The maid is dressed in a dull grey bodice and skirt. On the table, which is covered by a somewhat rumpled blue

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

cloth, are a glass inkstand, a drinking glass, and a casket. The background is of a sympathetic darkness.

Signed on the wall.

Canvas, 35 inches by 30 inches.

This is possibly No. 7 of the 1696 Sale, though that may be the *Letter* of Amsterdam. It belonged to Lebrun; to the Paillet Collection, Paris; to the Duchesse de Berry; to the Dufour Collection, Marseilles; to the Secretan Collection; to A. Paulovtsoff, St. Petersburg.

It sold in 1809 in Paris for 600 francs (\$120) at the Lebrun Sale; in 1818 it was sold at the Paillet Sale; in 1837 at the Duchesse de Berry's sale it sold for 405 francs (\$81).

A curious thing about this picture is that the background forms no part of the composition. It is the only conversation-piece by Vermeer where the lines and space on the walls do not continue and improve the design. This is only one of various things which lead one to wonder if the picture may possibly be by another man. It has none or few of the well-known Vermeer earmarks: the table covering is quite different from

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

that in most of Vermeer's works; the woman's morning sacque is of a different pattern from anything which appears in his pictures; the hair is dressed in a different way.

On the other hand, the picture is signed, and while with many men this would not prove much, in Vermeer's case it has not been worth while till recently to forge signatures, and this signature has no look of being new.

Also the painting is so admirable in many ways that one finds it hard to think of anyone else who might have done it.

### **THE PROCURESS (or The Courtesan)**

Museum of Dresden

A drab, of rosy hue, sits to the right of the canvas at a table, her face in three quarters as to the spectator. Her left hand holds a hock glass, while her right is extended to catch a piece of gold which a youth who stands behind her proffers. Her bodice is of canary-yellow, and she wears a white cap or kerchief edged with rude lace. The youth behind her wears a red tunic ornamented with a gold stripe. His hat, adorned with a peacock's feather, is of grey felt, which

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

shades his face and flowing locks. His left hand is on the girl's breast, his right hand proffers money. Somewhat behind him a crone, quite cloaked in black, regards him from the corner of her eyes.

At the extreme right of the canvas sits a gallant, turning to the left, who regards the spectator over his shoulder. He holds a glass of wine in his right hand and in his left a lute. He is dressed in a black pourpoint slashed with white, and has a large white collar with fantastic edging. A big cap or *beret* shades his face and his fluffy chestnut hair. The background, for the most part in grey, turns toward yellow behind the man with the wine glass.

Covering the table and depending from it is a large Turkish rug of red and yellow pattern against a grey-green ground. It is partly covered by a great fur cloak at the left. On the table beside the green hock glass is a blue and white wine jug.

Signed, in the right-hand corner, "J. v. Meer" (the J and M intertwined) and dated 1656.

Canvas, 57 inches by 52 inches.

Brought to Dresden in 1741 from the Wallenstein Collection at Dux. Catalogued as by J.

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

Vermeer since 1905. Now in the Picture Gallery, Dresden.

The *Procuress* is generally supposed to have been one of the earliest of Vermeer's paintings. It has its historic interest on that account. It is painted with a heavy and unrelenting hand, and is not so highly finished or of so pleasant a surface as are some of his later works. Apart from the fact that the subject is not a very appetising one, the composition has not all the beauty of some of his other works. It does not look as if Vermeer had thought much about the subject, as do some of his later works. The figures appear to be just jumbled together, although there is a composition of no mean order which is not, however, very obvious. Apart from the matter of composition, however, the whole picture is less sensitive than are some others of our master's. There are astonishing bits of still life in it. The goblet, for instance, is a marvel of painting.

When one comes to examine it carefully, one perceives certain things in the execution that show plainly enough that it was painted by a man who did not as yet have his *métier* at his fingers' ends. It is painted rather unevenly; that is, certain



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

parts seem to have gone well, whereas other bits are loaded quite heavily, as if our painter had painted and repainted on that part. The girl's yellow jacket is an instance of this. The paint is "gobbed" on, as artists say, very heavily. On the other hand, a bit nearby, the hock glass which she holds in her hand is painted with all the skill which Vermeer shows in his later work. It is interesting to note that in this, as in almost all of Vermeer's work, he had difficulties with the parts that moved now and then, whereas in the parts that kept still, like the rug or the table, he is masterly even at this early date.

The heads are all good in their varying way. The girl's head is well painted, quite characteristic as it is of the unthinking Dutch type of *filles de joie*. The old woman with her sharp, uncanny face makes one think of some of Degas' dreadful old women. The head of the gallant, with a glass, is well made — and it is worthy of note that this is one of the few instances where Vermeer has made a head so much in shadow — while the boor who leans over the girl is well painted except for his left hand, which lies on the woman's dress. This is singularly ill done, compared to some of the masterly bits about it.

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

The whole thing impresses one as an early work on which the artist has laboured earnestly, until he got it, in a measure, done. Evidently he learned some things in the making. For instance, this is one of the two known instances of Vermeer where the figures are life size. Apparently Vermeer satisfied himself that life-size figures were not in his province and did not attempt them again. He evidently learned gradually not to load his canvases as he does in this case; Dr. Valentiner speaks, in the Hudson-Fulton Catalogue of the "glassy" surface of some of his later pictures.

The composition of this picture is interesting for two reasons: first, that it is quite different from any of Vermeer's other work, and again that in spite of that it is still an admirable piece of space filling—the device of the rug filling the lower half of the composition is a bold one and yet so successful that the uninitiate does not notice it until his attention is called to it. The pattern of the figures against the background is an interesting one; and it is noteworthy that one's eyes focus on the right-hand side of the picture, yet so cleverly is this managed that one does not at first notice anything unusual.

The colour of this picture is so terrible as to be-

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

come very good. If one heard of such an arrangement, one would off hand condemn it, and yet in actual fact it proves agreeable and original.

### A GIRL READING A LETTER

#### Dresden Gallery

A young girl in a greenish-yellow bodice stands in profile facing a window at the left. She is looking down at a letter which she holds in both her hands. Her hair is dressed rather intricately with a love-lock falling to the shoulder. In front of her is a table, covered with a partly crumpled Oriental rug of red, yellow, and blue. A dish, tipping to the right, holds fruits, some of which have rolled on the table.

The window has a casement of leaded glass in which is reflected, rather too large, the young girl's head. A piece of cloth, hanging from the wall on the right, is draped about the top of the casement. The lion's-head chair stands in a corner below. In the extreme foreground, filling more than a fourth of the picture, hangs a portière of bronze-green silk.

There is a trace of the signature, "Meer," in the background.

**JAN VERMEER OF DELFT**  
**A GIRL READING A LETTER**  
**PICTURE GALLERY, DRESDEN**





-----



## VERMEER'S PICTURES

Canvas, 33 inches by 25½ inches.

First attributed to Rembrandt. Sold at Paris in 1742. Catalogued till 1862 as a Pieter de Hooch. Authenticated by Waagen in 1858.

This would seem to be one of the most beautiful and original of Vermeer's compositions. In general arrangement it is not unlike several of his; the *Pearl Necklace* in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, for instance, or the *Reader* of the Rijks Museum. What makes it unique is the amount of wall space above the figure's head. This is a device which has been used a good deal in modern interior painting, and, so far as one remembers, it originates with Vermeer, though Velasquez uses a somewhat similar arrangement in some of his portraits.

There are many charming passages in this picture. Vermeer has been so interested in the figure that in the treatment of the head and hands he has broken through his rather blocky square-touch manner and rendered them with more intensity and sympathy than in most of his works. The girl's head, with its slightly aquiline nose, is rather more *raffiné* than are some of his types; while the curious dressing of the hair reminds one of certain of Leonardo da Vinci's types.



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

The hands, again, though hardly absolutely successful, are at least treated with an intensity that Vermeer does not always arrive at. There is an effort at making the delicate modulation over the small bones of the carpus that is worthy of note.

The device of the head reflected in the glass casement is a charming and original one, which one does not recall having seen elsewhere. It is interesting to note that our artist has made the head somewhat distorted as it would appear reflected in two or three different panes. For instance, the forehead at the left in the reflection does not seem about to meet the top of the head and the outline of the cheek does not appear to fit with the chin.

Vermeer has overcome his difficulties in the drapery on the left and has rendered some parts of it with great beauty. He has been able to make it with great detail as it kept still for him, and the play of light and shade on this portière is beautifully rendered. On the other hand, the curtain draped over the window seems rather foolish. It may be that Vermeer could not have it still enough and had to hurry in his rendering. One always feels with his pictures that he was a slow

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

worker who needed to paint a thing over and over again to get its fullest expression.

The colour of this picture is hardly so beautiful as is some of Vermeer's. It is rather low in tone, which may explain why it was at various times attributed to Rembrandt and to Govaert Flink. It has not *la peinture blonde* which is so characteristic of much of Vermeer's work.

### **THE ASTRONOMER (sometimes called The Geographer)**

Städel'sches Institute, Frankfurt

A young man, rather to the left of the picture and facing in three quarters toward the left, leans over a table. His right hand lies on a book, while his left holds a pair of compasses. He wears a bluish gown with orange lining, and his long curls fall to his shoulders. He is busied with a white map of the stars which lies on the table before him. A large part of the table is covered with a crumpled Turkish rug. The light, which falls on his right shoulder, comes from a window to the extreme left of the canvas. This window is leaded in quaint design, and is partly obscured by a large curtain. Directly behind the astronomer is a wooden cabinet on which may be seen a

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

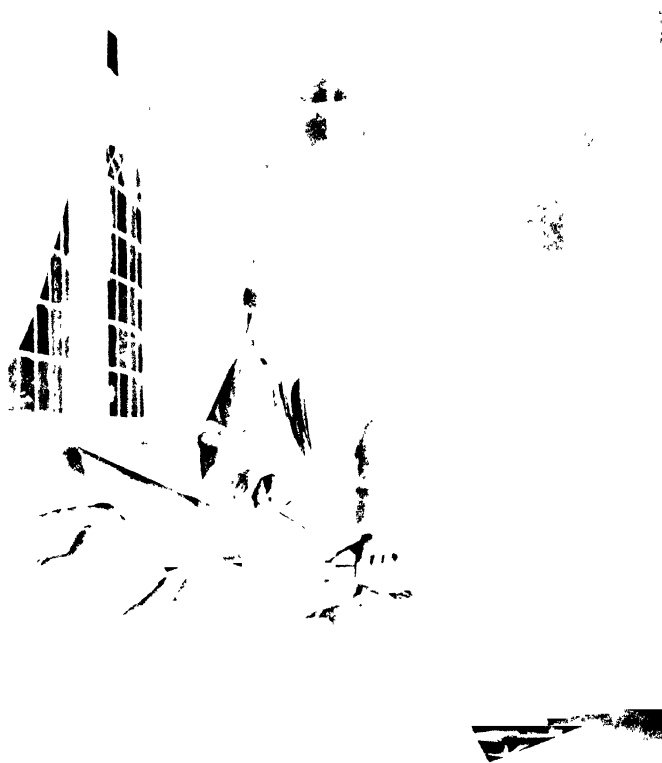
globe and certain books. Somewhat to the right of this, a framed map hangs on the wall. Immediately below this map is a chair, upholstered in tapestry. In the extreme foreground, to the right, may be seen a square stool, while certain papers lie on the floor behind it.

Signed, on the upper right panel of the cupboard door, "J. Meer" (with the J and M joined). In the right-hand upper corner of the wall are another signature and date which are not genuine.

Canvas, 21 inches by 18½ inches.

M. Vanzype suggests that this is one of two "pendants" in the 1696 Sale with *the Astronomer* belonging to the Rothschild Collection. Both are painted on canvas, while *The Geographer* of the du Bus de Gisignies Collection is painted on a panel. Moreover, this latter has many peculiarities which seem to show it is not by Vermeer.

It was sold at Amsterdam, 1797, at the Danser-Nyman Sale, for 132 florins (\$53). It belonged to the Goll von Franckenstein Collection; to the Dumont Collection; the Pereire Collection, Paris, and to the Bosch Collection of Vienna. Bought for the Frankfort Museum in 1885.



*Jan Vermeer of Delft*

## THE ASTRONOMER

STADEL'SCHES KUNSTINSTITUT, FRANKFORT-ON-MAIN



## VERMEER'S PICTURES

The head in this picture has many excellent qualities. It cannot be said that the outline of this head against the dresser is very good. It is the sort of thing of which Vermeer would never have been guilty at the time at which he painted the *Czernin Studio*. At the same time the way in which the shadows of the man's face are studied is quite remarkable. All through the picture one notices good bits, and yet it does not seem to be painted with that perfection of technique which we have come to associate with Vermeer. For this reason one is inclined to place it among his rather early ones, not far from the time of painting the *Milk-woman*. The "edges" are harder and less well understood than in the finest examples of our artist. It is interesting to compare the technique of the window in the upper left-hand corner with the same corner in the *Cup of Wine* in the Berlin Collection. There is no comparison between the two, and yet the *Cup of Wine* is by no means among our hero's best works.

It is instructive to note the *pointillé* workmanship in the rug. That apparently is a mark of Vermeer's early or rather early period, although it is worthy of note that it does not appear at all in his earliest known work, the *Courtesan*. He

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

seems to have used this dot stroke in emergencies all through his life, but it appears most often in rather early work, like the *Milk-woman*. On the other hand, one sees nothing of that square-touch technique which has been before mentioned — that apparently was a development of a later day.

### FRANCE

#### THE LACE-MAKER

Museum of the Louvre, Paris

A young girl, her head in three quarters, leans forward making lace on a blue pillow and frame. To her right, at the left of the picture, may be seen a blue pillow box from which straggle silk strands of white and of red. A book lies nearby. The table is covered with tapestry of the same pattern as appears in several of Vermeer's pictures. The girl's hair is dressed in antique guise, love-locks flowing confusedly therefrom. She wears a yellow bodice with a white lace collar; the wall or background is of Vermeer grey.

Signed in the upper right-hand corner, "J. v. Meer" (the letters J v M being intertwined).

Canvas, 9½ inches by 8 inches.

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

This is the *Girl Making Lace* of the 1696 Sale. In 1813, at the Muilman Sale, Amsterdam, it sold for 84 francs (\$16.80); in 1817, at the Lapeyrière Sale, for 501 francs (\$100), and at the Nagel Sale, 1851, for 265 florins (\$106). Bought for the Louvre, 1870, of M. Blockhuyzen of Rotterdam, for 1270 francs (\$254).

This little picture has long been the delight of earnest art students in Paris. Twenty-five years ago, when Vermeer was very little talked of, this picture was well known to the more intelligent students. In certain ways it suited the ideas of that time. It marked square-touch technique and its cool coloration made it more sympathetic to students than were many of the hot Dutch pictures.

It is one of the most characteristic of Vermeer's works, even though it is quite different in size and composition from most of his paintings. While the arrangement is satisfactory, there is not so much preoccupation with design as in many of his pictures.

On the other hand, the square-touch technique, the treatment of edges, and the peculiar colour scheme are particularly characteristic of the master.



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

Dr. Hofstede de Groot describes the dark blue cushion as having white and red feathers protruding from it. To the present writer it seems that these white and red forms are strands of silk issuing from the pillow box.

### THE ASTRONOMER

Collection of the late Baron Alphonse de  
Rothschild, Paris

A man, seated at the right of the canvas, faces toward the left. He leans forward and touches with his right hand a celestial globe which stands near the window to the left. Before him lies an open book. He is dressed in a blue gown and has long flowing hair. He sits in a bluish chair, and his left hand holds the corner of the table. This table is covered with a crumpled mass of blue-green tapestry, figured in yellow; the grey wall behind him is partly obscured by a cabinet on which hangs a chair. There are certain books on the top of this cabinet; to the right of it hangs a picture, *The Finding of Moses*, in a black frame.

Canvas, 20 inches by 18 inches.

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

Was in the Danser-Nyman Sale, Amsterdam, in 1797, where it sold for 270 florins (\$108); at the Gildemeester Sale in 1800, 340 florins (\$136). It was in the Lebrun Gallery.

### BELGIUM

#### PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG GIRL

Arenberg Gallery, Brussels

Portrait head and bust.

A young girl, the head in three quarters, looks over her left shoulder at the spectator. A yellowish drapery falls back of the head; the body is enveloped in a white shawl.

Signed at the left upper corner, "J. MEER" (the J and M intertwined).

No. 39 in the 1696 Sale, Amsterdam.

Somewhat the same pose and arrangement as the *Head of a Young Girl* of the Hague Gallery. It seems possible that the two pictures may be portraits of two of Vermeer's daughters. It is thought that this picture may be that sold to Dr. Luchtman of Rotterdam, in 1816, for 3 florins (\$1.20).

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

This Arenberg head, however, is not equal to the young girl's head at the Hague. The modelling seems to lack the firmness of the latter, and the paint quality is not so attractive. While the light and shade are well enough, they are hardly so remarkable as in that other.

Some enthusiasts have compared this head with the *Mona Lisa* of Da Vinci, but while it has excellent traits it is hardly of the same quality. It is true, however, that both this and the Hague head are painted with a subtlety of modelling quite beyond anything else done in Holland, so that an intensity of expression, almost mystical, is achieved.

### THE ASTRONOMER

Collection of the Vicomte du Bus de Gisignies,  
Brussels

A young man, in profile, sits in the left-hand part of the picture facing to the right. In his right hand he holds an open book: his left hand is extended to touch a celestial globe on the table nearby. Against the globe is leaned a larger open book. On the table, covered, as it is, by a Turkish rug, are to be seen a compass and other things.



*Jan Vermeer of Delft. (Authenticity contested)*

## THE ASTRONOMER

COLLECTION OF THE VICOMTE DU BUS DE GISIGNIES, BRUSSELS



## VERMEER'S PICTURES

The man, who wears a loose cap, is dressed in a gown of grey faced with leopard skin. The background of the room behind is largely obscured by a green curtain. From the ceiling hangs a quadrant.

Panel, 19 inches by 14½ inches.

Evidently not by Vermeer.

Sales: Isaac Péreire, Paris, 1872; Kums, Antwerp, 1898.

One's reasons for doubting this to be by Vermeer run somewhat as follows:

1. The picture is poor in light and shade, or *chiaroscuro*, which has always been one of Vermeer's distinguishing merits.

One has only to look at the cap to perceive this. One finds it difficult to see just where the light stops and where the shadow or "no-light" begins. One has nothing of this difficulty in the pictures best known to be by Vermeer, not even in the other two *Astronomers*. The light and shade of the book and other accessories are particularly poor.

2. The handling lacks the distinctive touch of Vermeer, and, on the other hand, has certain defects which never appear in his work. One sees nothing of the square-touch manner, by which, as

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

we have seen, Vermeer often laid in his pictures: nor do we see any trace of the *pointillé* touch which he so often used in finishing, especially in draperies such as curtains. In this curtain there is no trace of this.

On the other hand, there is a trivial, scratchy quality of touch in this which one would say never obtains in Vermeer's work. One notes this particularly in the way the hair is painted. The touch is in little streaks — made *en longue* — with no sense of the way in which the light would drift across the mass of the hair. One has only to compare this with the Rothschild *Astronomer* to note the difference of handling.

3. The way in which the "edges" are managed. For instance, in the upper hand one notes the shadow and reflected light made *en longue*, with the edges nearly as sharp as the edge of the light against the background. The edge of the face in shadow appears too sharp against the background.

4. The composition. In the first place the figure is turned in the opposite sense from all of Vermeer's subjects. It looks from left to right instead of from right to left; and, moreover, the light comes on the back of the head instead of on the face, as one notes in Vermeer's other sub-

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

jects. These facts, insignificant enough in themselves, are worth considering in connection with the other suggestions.

The composition is not made after what may be called the Vermeer receipt, which calls for uprights and horizontals in the background, against which the pattern of the figure is contrasted. Here a curtain, running diagonally, fills up a large part of the background instead of serving as a foil to the background, as it does in all of Vermeer's other pictures, where a curtain is introduced.

The quadrant, instead of cutting the line of the curtain, as one would expect in one of Vermeer's pictures, comes just to the edge.

### PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG MAN

Museum of Brussels

A young man, seated, his right hand resting on the back of his chair, looks in full face toward the spectator. He is dressed in black with a plain white collar, a small ornament apparently of gold depending from it. He wears a large high-crown hat of black. The chair is ornamented with lions' heads.



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

This portrait is thought by M. A. J. Wauters to be by Vermeer. On the other hand, Dr. Bredius of the Hague Museum does not think it is by the master of Delft.

Perhaps the strongest argument which Mr. Wauters brings to bear on the matter is that the chair in which the man sits has those lions' heads which adorned certain chairs in Vermeer's studio and which he was so fond of painting. This seems a rather weak argument, because, as Mr. Wauters himself admits, these chairs appear in the pictures of various other Dutch painters. He says they do not so appear in the works of Pieter de Hooch and Nicholas Maes, who had certain points of resemblance to Vermeer. But, as a matter of fact, one may see these self-same lions' heads chairs in a picture by De Hooch in the Wallace Collection.

However, it does not seem at all likely that De Hooch painted this portrait, as he was quite incapable of painting such a head. One thinks for a moment of Nicholas Maes, who certainly had the technical ability. But the Committee of the Museum of the Hague, after comparing this portrait with one by Maes in the National Gallery of London, decided quite definitely that the picture was not by Maes.

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

One really comes, then, by a process of elimination as it were, to wonder whether the picture is not by Vermeer. Certain things beside the lions' heads lead us to think this may be so. There are certain points of resemblance between its *facture* and that of the *Letter* of Dresden, of the *Cup of Wine* in Berlin, and of the *Portrait of a Woman* of Buda-Pesth. On the other hand, so far as one remembers, Vermeer never "lost" an edge as the edge of the hat in this picture is lost in the background. Also the hand is not painted at all as the hand of, let us say, the *Lace-Maker* is made.

But the thing which on the whole convinces us that the picture is by Vermeer is its colour. No one else, one would guess, ever got just that note of colour. One cannot, unfortunately, describe colour in writing, but this colour is just the cool, distinguished note so characteristic of Vermeer.

### AUSTRIA

#### PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN

Museum of Buda-Pesth

A woman stands almost in full face. Her hands are folded. She wears a little cap and a large white collar decorated with a knot of yellow silk.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

Her dress is dark blue. She has large white cuffs, and on her right hand a glove decked out with yellow ribbons in intricate detail. In her left hand she holds the other glove, while her right holds a small fan. At her left, behind her, shows a table cover, reddish in hue, worked out in some detail. The form of a chair shows vaguely at her right.

Canvas, 32½ inches by 26 inches.

Formerly in the Esterhazy Collection, Vienna.

This portrait was at one time attributed to Rembrandt. His reputation and prestige were so enormous that they naturally engulfed any Dutch portrait of unknown authorship which happened to be remarkably good. It was just as Whistler has appropriated all the *mots* of his time. When one comes to look the portrait over, one perceives at once that whoever made it was not Rembrandt. The *facture*, the manner of attack, and the colour are quite different.

What leads one to think it by Vermeer is the colour arrangement, the colour quality, and the *facture*. The little bows are of the yellow that Vermeer loved, and they are brushed in in just the

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

square-touch crisp manner that he affected. The colour quality or tonality of the whole thing is more like Vermeer than like anyone else whom we can think of.

And characteristic of Vermeer is the startling impression of life which the portrait gives at first sight.

### A PAINTER'S STUDIO

Czernin Gallery, Vienna

A painter seated, his back to the spectator somewhat to the right foreground of the canvas, is at work on a canvas on which his subject is sketched in chalk.

He wears a curious doublet with black strips of cloth over white; about his waist is a sort of sash. He wears very loose knickerbockers and red hose, over which appear curious stockings with low shoes. On his head is a velvet *beret*. His right hand holding a brush leans against a mahlstick. He is painting a bit of the model's wreath in a bluish tone.

The model, apparently intended for a figure of Renown, stands in profile in the middle of the picture facing to the left — her head slightly turn-

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

ing, in three quarters, toward the artist. In her left hand she holds a trumpet, in her right a book. She is dressed in a bluish sort of gaberdine with a light-coloured skirt. Behind her is a big map of the Seven Provinces, covering a large part of the wall.

To the extreme right of the picture in the immediate foreground is a large Gobelins tapestry which fills quite a fourth of the picture. Close to it, also in the foreground, is a chair with brass bosses. Behind this is a table littered up with various objects—an open book, another book standing on end, a work-basket, certain draperies, and, curiously enough, a cast from the *Brutus* of Michael Angelo. From the timbered ceiling hangs a brass chandelier; the floor is of light and dark squares.

Signed "J. Ver-Meer."

Canvas, 52 inches by 44 inches.

Long attributed to De Hooch. Authenticated by Bürger-Thoré in 1865.

After Vermeer's death the picture was in possession of his widow, Catherina Bolnes, who gave it to her mother as security for a loan.

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

Perhaps it is not too much to say that this painting is the supreme technical achievement of the world. One is not particularly interested in the composition, which, indeed, is almost absurd in some respects. The girl's figure is merely a model stuck up in a silly position. But it is the one picture of Vermeer's, or of anyone else, which has almost no discernible flaw in technique. The man's hand and possibly the hand of the girl which holds the trumpet are the only bits where one can note any faltering. One feels, in looking at this picture, that the artist worked for the supreme joy of rendering what he saw as he saw it.

"He painted the thing as he saw it  
For the God of things as they are."

This may not seem a good thing to the layman, but any artist will understand Vermeer's happiness in perfect technical achievement. As one looks over this, everything seems well made — all one can say of it is that some things are even better done than others.

Perhaps the most surprising technical thing in it is the rendering of the chandelier. Here is a most intricate matter painted with perfect simplicity. Note the way in which certain parts are

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

brought out sharp and other parts are blurred. Mention has been made elsewhere of Vermeer's treatment of "edges." In places the edge is made quite sharp, in others it is fused into the background.

This insistence on edges persists through the whole picture. In looking at the man's head, one notes where the hair blurs into the map on the light side, where the artist's dark cap comes sharp against the map where the map is light, blurs a trifle where it comes darker, sharpens again where it comes against the light of the map and the easel.

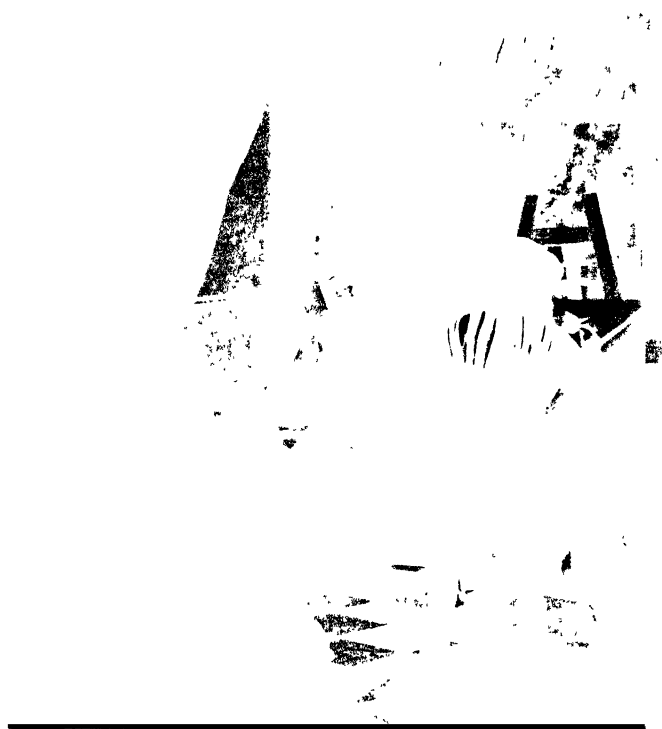
Any bit in the picture which one chooses to study is rendered with the same understanding of the character of the edge.

The map, again, is one of the marvellous things in this picture. It is rendered in the most astonishing detail and yet it keeps its place perfectly well. All the little pictures of towns are made out — the little ships are rendered — the allegorical design in the corner and all the countless minutiae of the map itself are made, and yet the light slides across it as simply and naturally as it does on one of the bare walls Vermeer so loved to paint.

**JAN VERMEER OF DELFT**  
**ARTIST AT WORK, OR THE STUDIO**  
**COLLECTION OF COUNT CZERNIN VON CHUDENITZ, VIENNA**









## VERMEER'S PICTURES

In colour this is the Vermeer which comes nearest to the actual aspect of nature. In looking at it one simply feels the colour as one would feel it in nature; there is no forced tonality, nor is there the apparently accidental tonality — the bluish or greenish or greyish note that occurs in some of Vermeer's pictures. The only tonality is that which always exists in nature — the hardest to get and the most beautiful. The only way to get it is to paint each colour value exactly right, trusting to no binding "sauce" to pull the thing together; and this, apparently, is what Vermeer has done. That is one of the reasons why this picture is so interesting to modern artists — that Vermeer has here accomplished what so many modern painters are trying to do. He has achieved a beautiful tonality simply by getting his thousand and three colour values right.

Many critics have expressed the opinion that the artist here represented is Vermeer himself, but it is difficult to see how this could be. These are some of the reasons. It will be observed that the letters on the map are in positive, not in negative, so if the picture were done in a mirror it must have been with two mirrors, a reflection of a reflection. It would be very difficult to ar-

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

range two mirrors in this way, and one fancies that one or both mirrors would have shown a double edge. Moreover, it would seem to be impossible in this way to get so wide an angle of vision as appears in this picture. And last, it would have been quite impossible to see the detailed forms in the map, which are rendered in such astonishing clearness and detail, in a reflection of a reflection. Yet more, it would have been impossible to have avoided a distinct greenish tone, which is just what Vermeer this time, for once in his life, has managed to escape.

Dr. Hofstede de Groot considers that this *Studio* is the same as the *Portrait of Vermeer* — in “a room with rich accessories, painted in an unusually fine style,” of the 1696 Amsterdam Sale. Certainly the description sounds not unlike it, though it is rather vague. But it would seem that the reasons just given were enough to make one doubt if the two pictures were the same. Moreover, when one thinks that the picture measures 4 feet 4 inches by 4 feet 8 inches, the price of 45 florins (\$18) seems too ridiculous to have been paid only eighteen years after his death for one of the largest and most highly finished works of the not yet forgotten master.

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

Who the model was we have no means of ascertaining. One would like to think that it may have been Pieter de Hooch, who, we know, was in Delft at the same time with Vermeer for three or four years. Unfortunately, De Hooch was in Delft while Vermeer was still a young man. This picture is evidently, from its technical perfection, one of Vermeer's latest. So the identity of the artist must apparently remain forever unknown.

An interesting detail that we get from this painting is that the artist has sketched in his subject with white chalk and is painting it *de premier coup* or *alla prima*, touch by touch, without having made any rub-in or *ébauche*. While we have seen that the artist can hardly be Vermeer himself, it suggests that this way of painting may possibly have been his own method. Of course he may have felt an ironic satisfaction in painting some friend who was working the wrong way. But, as the man who posed for this must have posed for a very long time, as is evidenced by the finish and perfection of the technique, it seems likely that he was a model and not a real artist who could hardly have spared the time. In that case it seems likely that Vermeer would

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

have himself sketched in a start on the canvas in the manner in which he was apt to paint.

It is strange that the perfection of a man's work should militate against it. Yet something like this has happened to this *Studio*. In sheer technique it is probably the most perfect of Vermeer's works and the colour is as we have seen, better preserved than is that of many of his paintings. Yet, because the colour has not the bluish-grey quality of some of his works, the picture has never met with quite the same favour among many admirers of his work as have some of his other pictures. Notwithstanding this, it is a marvellous production. It carries reality as far as Vermeer ever carried it. Yet it is a reality that is wholly artistic.

It is a curious and rather pathetic thing about this picture that the artist should be represented as painting a figure of Renown, for Renown passed Vermeer by for many years. If he had any really literary idea in painting this Renown, he must have conceived it in rather ironic vein. And surely he was well punished for joking about the Olympians. One must call "Eumenides" those unnamed ones who bring pain and punishment to evil doers. The Irish call their fairies the "Good People," however they may fear them. And one must not

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

jest about Renown or any other of the almighty gods under penalty of the reward that was meted out to Vermeer.

Another curious detail, which does not seem to have been noted by previous writers, is the fact that the cast on the table is from the noble head by Michael Angelo commonly called *Brutus*. Of course it is well known that many Dutch artists had casts from the antique. Those from the Italian were not so common. Though Vermeer and Michael Angelo were so different in many ways, they had this in common — an understanding of “planes” and a habit of indicating their work in very broad planes. This is particularly marked in the *Brutus*, which is an unfinished head just roughed in in planes, and therefore an excellent study for a beginner. Doubtless Vermeer, with his liking for beginning a thing in broad planes, acquired this head on that account. If Leonard Bramer were really his master, it may have been brought from Italy by him.

The pictures named in the foregoing catalogue make up, so far as one is aware, all the known examples of Vermeer. There are, however, a number of pictures mentioned in catalogues, at one time or at another, as being by Vermeer.



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

As we do not know just where these pictures are at present, we have no exact means of ascertaining their authenticity. A list of these is, however, given as an interesting detail. This list is made up from Dr. Hofstede de Groot's admirable *Catalogue Raisonné*, to whom due acknowledgment is hereby made.

*A Young Girl Conversing with a Doctor.*

Canvas, 32 inches by 15 inches.

Sale: J. Hulswit, Amsterdam, 1822.

*A Man Reading.*

Copper, 17 inches by 15 inches.

Sale: Leyden, 1821.

*The Goldsmith's Shop.*—In the gold and silver-smith's shop four tradesmen sit at a table. One has a touchstone in his hand. There are also two workmen.

Canvas, 12 inches by 13½ inches.

Sale: Barend Kooy, Amsterdam, 1820.

*A Woman Weighing Gold.*—According to the description in the sale catalogue this picture corresponds precisely to the picture of the Nieuhoff Sale, 1777 (now in the Widener Collection). The woman, however, wears a red dress and a black

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

cap. It is stated, also, in this case that an open door gives a view into a second room. Moreover, the dimensions differ from the Widener picture.

Canvas, 24 inches by 21 inches.

Sales: The Hague, 1780 (?); Amsterdam, 1809.

*At the Art-Dealer's.* — A gentleman sits, leaning his elbow on a table, and inspects some objects of art which an art-dealer is showing him. He holds a paper in his hand.

Signed on the paper, "J. v. d. Meer."

Panel, 11 inches by 10 inches.

Sale: M. Neven, Cologne, 1879.

*The Flower-Girl.* — A young girl, seen at three-quarters length, stands facing the spectator. With her left hand she holds her cloak, and with the right holds out a bunch of flowers. Behind her is a stone bridge with a balustrade, beyond which is a high wall with Roman statues. On a pedestal near the girl are a bird and a large sculptured vase, with a spray of orange blossoms.

Canvas, 19½ inches by 16½ inches.

Sale: Clavé-Bouhaben, Cologne, 1894.

*A Young Woman Sewing.* — At a window, a woman sits sewing beside a table covered with a

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

cloth on which is a beer-jug. The light streams in through a window. An open door shows another room hung with gilt leather.

Canvas, 19 inches by 15 inches.

Sales: Amsterdam, 1779, according to W. Bürger; J. Pekstok, Amsterdam, 1792.

*A Lady Making Lace.* — She sits at a table. It is finely painted. By Vermeer or in his style.

Panel, 9½ inches by 8 inches.

Sale: D. de Jongh, Rotterdam, 1810.

*A Woman Making Lace.*

20 inches by 16 inches.

Sale: Hoorn, 1817.

*A Woman Making Lace.* — Fine in the effect of light, brown and vigorously painted.

Panel, 12 inches by 10½ inches.

Sale: H. Stokvisch, C. Henning and others, Amsterdam, 1823.

*Woman and Boy Sitting by the Fireside in a Room.*

Panel, 24 inches by 18 inches.

Sale: A. van Beestingh and others, Rotterdam, 1832.

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

*A Woman at Work with a Child.* — A woman in a silk dress, trimmed with fur, sits working by a table in an interior. A little girl offers her an apple.

Canvas, 37 inches by 24 inches.

Sale: Roos, Amsterdam, 1841, according to W. Bürger.

*A Woman with Needlework in her Lap.* — She looks at a child seated on the ground near her. By Vermeer or in his manner.

Panel, 36 inches by 26 inches.

Sales (supplementary): P. M. Kesler and others, Amsterdam, 1844; J. A. A. de Lelie and others, Amsterdam, 1833.

*Woman and Child.* — In the background of a room is a young woman, brightly illumined by the light from a window to the left. Through a half-open door behind her is seen a bed. In front of the woman is a cradle with a sleeping child: to the right are a small stove, kitchen utensils on shelves, different vegetables, and a cock in a hen-coop. In the foreground, which is in shadow, an elderly woman is busy cooking at the fireplace to the left; about her are pots and pans.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

Signed, "J. v. der M.;" canvas, 14½ inches by 19½ inches.

Sale: C. Triepel, Munich, 1874.

*An Old Woman with a Reel.* — She is sitting almost in profile and is seen at full length, almost life-size. She has her hands in her lap. To the right is the reel. The background is a light wall.

A small object on the wall has the form of a monogram of Vermeer. "J. v. M." (the letters intertwined); canvas, 52 inches by 44 inches.

Ascribed by Philipps, Eastlake, W. Bürger, and Waagen to Vermeer of Delft.

Offered to the National Gallery, London, in the time of W. Bürger, for £157 10s., but declined; afterwards it was for some time in Bürger's possession and then again in that of an English dealer.

*A Woman Paring Turnips.* — In an interior a woman is paring turnips. Near her is a child in a cradle. On the other side a man sits reading by the hearth.

Panel, 23½ inches by 19½ inches.

Sale: J. A. Brentano, Amsterdam, 1822.

*A Young Woman Skinning an Eel.* — A young woman, shown at half length, sits, with her head



*Jan Vermeer of Delft*

A YOUNG LADY SEATED AT THE SPINET  
NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON



## VERMEER'S PICTURES

to the left, conversing with an unseen person. She wears a cap and a red bodice under a purple jacket. On her lap she holds a dish and a napkin.

Signed, with the monogram; canvas, on panel, 12 inches by 8½ inches.

Sale: Néville D. Goldsmid, Paris, 1876.

*A Girl with a Cat.* — A young girl with a cap and a brown jacket is petting a cat. She leans her hands on a partition.

Canvas, 22 inches by 18 inches.

Sale: E. Ruelens, Brussels, 1883.

*A Lady with a Maid-Servant and a Page.*

28 inches by 25 inches.

Sale: Maclean, London, 1903.

*An Interior with a Gentleman Washing his Hands.*  
— With a vista and figures.

Sale: Amsterdam, 1696.

*A Woman Combing her Hair.*

15 inches by 13 inches.

Sale: Pieter de Klok — not Blok, as W. Bürger says. Amsterdam, 1744.

*A Woman Washing a Boy's Head in a Room.*

Sale: H. van der Heuvel and J. Hackefort, Rotterdam, 1815.



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

*A Domestic Scene.* — Three figures in an interior.

Sale: Rotterdam, 1820.

*A Domestic Scene.* — Three figures in an interior. Possibly identical with preceding subject.

Sale: Rotterdam, 1832.

*A Man Playing Music with a Lady in an Interior.*

Sale: Amsterdam, 1696.

*A Lady at the Spinnet with a Gentleman.* — Both are playing music. Through an open window are seen some houses.

Canvas, 32 inches by  $25\frac{3}{4}$  inches.

Sale: J. J. de J. J. de Faesch, Amsterdam, 1833.

*The Concert.*

15 inches by  $11\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

Sale: London, 1901.

*The Love-Letter.* — In an interior a page hands a letter to a lady.

Panel,  $15\frac{1}{2}$  inches by  $12\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

Sale: Hope Edwards and others, London, 1901.

*A Lady Writing.* — A well-dressed lady in a morning toilet having a yellow jacket trimmed

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

with fur, sits writing at a table on which are a casket and writing materials. She looks at the spectator.

Canvas, 18½ inches by 14 inches.

Sales: (probably) Amsterdam, 1696; Dr. Luchtmans, Rotterdam, 1816; (probably) J. Kammers, Rotterdam, 1825; H. Reydon and others, Amsterdam, 1827; Comte F. de Robiano, Brussels, 1837.

*A Merry Company in a Room.*

Sale: Amsterdam, 1696.

*A Gentleman and Lady Eating Oysters.* — A lady stands in a room pouring wine into a tall glass which she holds on a silver platter. On the table near her are a dish of oysters and a plate of bread. A gentleman seated near it watches the lady attentively.

Canvas or panel, 19½ inches by 16 inches.

Sale: Jacob Crammer Simonsz, Amsterdam, 1778.

*A Girl and a Cavalier.* — A young man is courting a young woman who holds a wine glass. To the left is a table with various objects.

Panel, 12 inches by 9½ inches.

Sale: Dr. Luchtmans, Rotterdam, 1816.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

*A Trooper and a Girl.* — In an open hall a trooper sits, holding a half-clad girl on his knee. In front of him stands a Cupid, whom the girl beckons to her while she points to the soldier. To the right is a view into the landscape. On the floor are various trophies of war — standards, trumpets, and so forth.

Panel, 16 inches by 20½ inches.

Sale: Von Woyna and others, Bonn, 1898.

*A Country Fair.*

Sale: J. Kamermans, Rotterdam, 1825.

*Head of a Person in Antique Costume.* — Pendant to the Arenberg *Portrait of a Young Girl*.

Sale: Amsterdam, 1696.

*Portrait of a Young Lady.* — A half-length. She wears a red dress with broad white sleeves, and a large felt hat with plumes, beneath which are seen her long brown curls.

Panel, 29 inches by 22½ inches.

Sale: Neven, Cologne, 1879.

*Portrait of Vermeer.* — In an interior with various accessories.

Sale: Amsterdam, 1896.

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

*Portrait of a Young Man.* — Nearly a half-length. The man wears a broad-brimmed hat of red plush and a blue cloak. Strong sunlight falls on his left cheek. The hat brim casts a deep shadow on the upper part of the face.

Panel, 9 inches by 7 inches.

Sale: Lafontaine, Paris, 1822.

*Study of a Head.* — A boy with a broad-brimmed hat, facing the spectator. Painted in oils on paper.

Sale: Collection of drawings formed by G. Leembruggen, Amsterdam, 1896 (Suermondt). This is the painting thought by Plietzsch to be a Vermeer.

*A View of Some Houses.* — This must have been smaller than, or of inferior quality to, the Six picture, since it fetched a lower price.

Sale: Amsterdam, 1696.

*The Oude Gracht in Haarlem near Klein Heiligh-land.* — Numerous countrymen with their wives are crossing the water in a boat to celebrate "Hartjesdag" on the dunes.

According to the sales catalogue, the picture bore the signature — probably added — of Berck-

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

Heyde, but according to the general opinion it was the work of Vermeer of Delft.

Panel, 18 inches by 15½ inches.

Sale: G. van der Pals, Rotterdam, 1824.

*View of a Street in Delft.*

Panel, 14 inches by 9 inches.

Sale: Abraham de Haas, Amsterdam, 1824.

*A Landscape with Trees.*

Sale: Amsterdam, 1825.

*Part of a Town with a View into an Entry.*

Panel.

Sale: Amsterdam, 1825.

*A Picture of a Street.* — In front of an old house, a girl converses with an aged woman who reclines at a window. Through a doorway is seen the street.

Panel.

Sale: Amsterdam, 1828.

*The Back of a House with a Courtyard.*

Canvas.

Sales: Amsterdam, 1828; Amsterdam, 1830.

*Two Pictures of Streets with Figures.*

Panel, 14 inches by 9 inches each.

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

Sales: D. Teengs, Amsterdam, 1811; J. J. de J. J. de Faesch, Amsterdam, 1833.

*Procession at the Gateway of Leyden University on Degree-Day.*

Canvas, 29 inches by 24 inches.

Sale: P. van Romondt, Amsterdam, 1833.

*Scene in a Courtyard.* — Two boys are playing in the straw in the courtyard of a brick house. A woman stands in a doorway looking on. To the right, down a passage, is seen a street.

Panel, 18 inches by 14 inches.

Sale: A. W. C. Baron van Nagell van Ampsen, the Hague, 1851.

*A Picture of a Street.* — A view in a town of picturesque houses with four figures: the dimensions recall the views of towns by J. Vrel.

Sales: H. Reydon and others, Amsterdam, 1827; A. W. C. Baron van Nagell van Ampsen, the Hague, 1851.

*A Violent Storm at Sea.* — With a shipwreck and many figures.

Panel, 20 inches by 16 inches.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

In the possession of Von Krane-Matena, Darmstadt, in 1863.

One can hardly think of a subject more unlike those of Vermeer or more unfitted to his talent.

*A Public Place at the Hague.* — In the square are a pump and lime trees. In the right background are houses of varied architecture with picturesque angles. In the foreground in full light is a knife-grinder, seen in profile. He converses with an old woman wearing a grey felt hat, who leans on a stick and holds a bottle in her right hand. Behind them a young woman waits with folded arms for the knife-grinder to sharpen her knife. She listens absently to the compliments which a gallant is paying her. A huntsman with a dog crosses the square. Other figures, here and there, are going away in different directions. A cart with two white horses comes forward.

52 inches by 77 inches.

The picture can hardly have been by Vermeer, since nothing is known concerning any such picture from his hand.

Sale: Demidoff, San Donato, near Florence, 1880.

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

### OTHER PICTURES

There are certain pictures which at one time or another have been attributed to Vermeer: yet later they have been found to be by other men; so at least the opinion of experts has decided. The following list taken from Dr. H. de Groot's *Catalogue Raisonné* gives most of these.

#### List of *Pseudo* Vermeers

1. The *Family Group*, in the Czernin Gallery, is by Renesse.

2. The *Soldiers at a Tavern*, in the Borghese Gallery, is by P. de Hooch (see 262 in Dr. H. de Groot's *Catalogue Raisonné* of De Hooch's work).

3. *Card-Players*, No. 12 in the Angiot Sale, Paris, 1875, is by P. de Hooch (see 264, H. de G.'s Catalogue).

4. *Family in the Courtyard of the House*, in the Vienna Academy, is by P. de Hooch (see 321 H. de G.'s Catalogue).

5. *Two Ladies and Two Gentlemen in an Interior*, in the Havermeyer Collection, New York, is by P. de Hooch (see 192 H. de G.'s Catalogue).

6. The *Music Lesson*, in the Wallace Collection,



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

is by Jan Steen (see 412, H. de G.'s Catalogue of Jan Steen's work).

7. *The Woman Peeling Apples*, in the Wallace Collection, is by P. de Hooch (see 33 H. de G.'s Catalogue).

8. *A Young Woman Peeling an Apple for her Child*, in the Imperial Gallery, Vienna, is by G. Terburg.

9. *Concert with Four Persons*, in the Kurt Collection, Berlin, was offered to the Brussels Museum, in 1861, as a P. de Hooch.

10. *The sleeping Maid-Servant*, in W. Bürger's Collection in 1866 and No. 34 in the Bürger-Thoré Sale, Paris, 1892, is not by Vermeer.

11. *Old Woman Reading the Bible*, in the Collection of Adolphe Schoss, Paris, is a fully signed Jacobus Vrel.

12. *A Boy Blowing Soap-Bubbles*, is by Esaias Boursse.

13. *A Young Gentleman Writing a Letter* is by G. Metz (see 185 H. de G.'s Catalogue of Metz).

14. The so-called *Portrait of the Artist* in W. Bürger's Collection in 1866, and now in the possession of Porgès, Paris, is by C. de Man.



*Pieter de Hooch*

FAMILY IN THE COURTYARD OF A HOUSE

ACADEMIE DER BILDENDEN KUNSTE, VIENNA



## VERMEER'S PICTURES

15. *The Country House*, in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin, is by Dirck Jan van der Laan.

16. *The Vestibule of the St. Agatha Cloister*, in the Rijks Museum, is probably by E. de Witte.

17. *Interior of a Cloister*, in W. Bürger's Collection, is by J. Vrel.

18. *A Nun Conversing with a Woman in the Street*, in W. Bürger's Collection in 1866, is by J. Vrel.

19. *Interior of a Town*, in the Rijks Museum, No. 2600, is signed J. Vrel. It was in W. Bürger's Collection in 1866, and was No. 33 in the Bürger-Thoré Sale, Paris, 1892.

20. *Interior of a Town*, in the Hudtwalker Collection, Hamburg, in Bürger's time, is by J. Vrel.

21. *Pictures of a Town*, certainly not by Vermeer.

22. Landscapes, certainly not by Vermeer, but by his namesake at Haarlem.

23. Three still-life pieces, not by Vermeer; the one in the Hermitage is certainly by M. de Hondekoeter.

24. Pictures which W. Bürger himself only claimed very doubtfully for Vermeer.

It is, of course, quite impossible to give the precise order in which Vermeer's pictures were

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

painted. At the same time one may hazard a shrewd guess as to whether a picture were painted early or late in his career. Indeed, his pictures would seem to divide themselves rather easily into an early, middle, and late period. For instance, the *Courtesan*, *Mary and Martha*, and the *Diana* strike one at once as being early pictures. On the other hand, from the finished perfection of their technique, the *Studio*, the *New Testament*, and the *Love-Letter* (Amsterdam) would seem among his latest. It is not so easy to pick out at once a picture of the middle period, but those which seem neither to fit the early nor the late group fall naturally enough into the middle.

Again, certain pictures like the *View of Delft*, the *Milk-woman*, and the *Street in Delft* seem from their heavy and often *pointillé* technique to be early, but not so early as the three above mentioned. And so, also, certain pictures, like the *Music Lesson* of Windsor or the *Pearl Necklace*, appear, from the beauty of their technique to be late ones, and yet, because they do not have quite the same ease of handling, one hesitates to include them among the very latest.

[ ~ Assuming that pictures heavy in handling, hot, and low-keyed belong to Vermeer's early times,

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

we get two other groups. One, of the three *Astronomer* pictures, might follow after the *Milk-maid*, the *View of Delft*, and *Street in Delft*. These latter, from their heavy handling and *pointillé* touch, might seem to follow directly after the first suggested group.

Next to the *Astronomers* might come a group comprising *The Sleeping Girl*, *the Soldier and the Laughing Girl*, and the *Reader* of Dresden. These are placed after, because their subject seems to suggest Vermeer's later work, though the technique suggests something earlier.

On the other hand, we find a group of pictures which by their technique seem quite late and yet do not have the accomplished ease of the *Studio* or the *Love-Letter*, nor even quite the finish of pictures like the *Music Lesson* or the *Woman with Pearls*.

Of this group one might cite the *Woman Reading* of the Amsterdam Gallery or the *Lace-Maker* of the Louvre.

In the *Pearl Necklace* group would come a number of Vermeer's pictures. Among them might be the *Young Lady seated at the Spinnet* of the National Gallery, which shows such ease of execution that one is almost inclined to include it in the last group.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

Near this should come the National Gallery *Young Lady at the Virginals*, painted in much the same manner. Dr. H. de Groot is inclined to believe that the *Lady Playing the Guitar* was painted at about the same time. With these might go the *Girl at the Spinnet* of the Beit Collection, which looks like a study for the National Gallery *Young Lady at the Spinnet*.

It is interesting to note that most of Vermeer's musical subjects seem to group themselves together; that is, from the technique one guesses that most of them were painted at somewhere near the same time. Thus the *Lady with the Lute* seems, from composition and handling, to have been painted at a time not far distant from these others, though possibly a little earlier.

There is another, the *Young Woman at the Casement*, which from its composition and the ease of its handling seems to ally itself with this group.

In trying to arrive at something like the order in which Vermeer's pictures were painted, one sometimes puts an inferior picture at a later date than a very good one. For instance, the *Milk-woman*, one of his finest productions, is placed very early. But one judges the lateness of date

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

of these pictures by the ease, suavity, and freedom of the technique. The *Milkwoman* with all its merits is rather laboured, while a picture like the *Lady at the Spinet*, obviously not so fine, is placed quite late on account of the accomplished ease of its technique. It is true that certain painters toward the end of their life have developed a fumbling technique, but these lived till old age. It should be remembered that Vermeer died while quite young, at the age of forty-three. It seems safe to assume that in this short life his technique steadily became easier, more accomplished, freer.

On this basis one is inclined to place certain vastly fine pictures, like the *Pearl Necklace* and the *Windsor Music Lesson*, a little earlier than the *Lady at the Spinet*. The *Concert*, by composition, surface, and technique, groups itself with the *Music Lesson*; and the *Woman Weighing Pearls* seems about the same time as the *Pearl Necklace*, though a little later, one would guess. In the same way one would place the *Lady Writing a Letter* of the Beit Collection and the *Lady and a Maid Servant* of the Simon Collection a little earlier, because with all their finesse they seem a trifle heavier-handed.



## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

We have, then, finally indicated six groups, which might be called the *Courtesan* group, the *Milk-woman* group, the *Astronomer* group, and, at the other end of the painter's life—the *Lace-Maker* group, the *Pearl Necklace* group, and the *Studio* group.

There are left a few pictures, not of quite the masterly technique of the later ones—not so well drawn for one thing—yet rather more accomplished than, even though hardly so good as, some of the earlier ones. Of these one might cite the *Coquette* of the Brunswick Gallery, the *Girl Drinking Wine* of Berlin, and Mr. Frick's *Singing Lesson*.

Vermeer, one might guess, like other great painters, suffered a slight lapse somewhere in the middle of his career. His work seems to falter. Later his talent re-affirms itself. He seems also to have learned better just what he could do and what he could not do, and thus we have the later masterpieces.

The portraits are exceedingly difficult to place, because they are done in a manner rather different from the small pieces. One would guess, however, that if the Brussels *Young Man with a Hat* be Vermeer's work it was done rather early.

## VERMEER'S PICTURES

On the other hand, one would suppose the two heads of young girls — that of the Hague and that of the Arenberg Collection — were painted quite late in Vermeer's short life. Not only the accomplished technique leads to this conclusion, but the fact that the two girls, if they were his daughters (which seems probable enough) would have been too young earlier in his life.

The *Woman*, of Buda-Pesth, is hard to place. Dr. Hofstede de Groot, however, says that the costume would place it at about 1655-1660. This would make it about the time of the *Procuress*. The technique, however, more flowing and accomplished, would seem to indicate a rather later time.

From all these considerations we arrive at a provisional list, giving, not, indeed, the precise order of his works, but possibly suggesting a grouping which may not be wholly amiss. Such a list might run somewhat as follows:

### GROUP I

*The Courtesan*

*Mary and Martha*

*The Toilet of Diana*

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

*Portrait of a Woman*, Buda-Pesth

*Portrait of a Young Man*, Brussels

### GROUP II

*The Milk-woman*

*View of Delft*

*Street in Delft*

### GROUP III

*The Geographer*

*The Astronomer*, Late Baron A. de Rothschild

*The Astronomer*, Vicomte du Bus de Gisignies

### GROUP IV

*The Soldier and the Laughing Girl*

*The Sleeping Girl*

*The Reader*, Dresden

### GROUP V

*The Coquette*

*The Taste of Wine*

*The Singing Lesson*, Frick Collection

### GROUP VI

*The Reader*, Amsterdam

*The Lace-Maker*

### GROUP VII

*Portrait*, The Hague

*Portrait*, Arenberg Collection



*Jan Vermeer of Delft*

## THE ASTRONOMER

COLLECTION OF THE LATE BARON ALPHONSE DE ROTHSCHILD, PARIS



## VERMEER'S PICTURES

*Lady with a Maid Servant*, Simon Collection

*Lady Writing Letter*, Beit Collection

*The Music Lesson*, Windsor

*The Concert*

*The Pearl Necklace*

*Lady with a Lute*

*Lady Writing*, Morgan Collection

*Lady Weighing Gold*

*Young Woman at Casement*

*Lady at Virginals*

*Lady with Guitar*

*Young Lady seated at the Spinet*, National Gallery

*Girl at the Spinet*, Beit Collection

### GROUP VIII

*The New Testament*

*The Love-Letter*, Amsterdam

*The Studio*

There remains only *The Girl with the Flute*, which does not seem to place itself with any of these groups.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY





## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- DIRK EVERTS VAN BLEYSWYCK. — *Beschrijving der Stad Delft*. Arnold Bon. 1667.
- BALTHAZAR DE MONCONYS. — *Journal des Voyages*. Lyons. 1676.
- HOUBRAKEN. — *Lives of Dutch Painters*. Amsterdam. 1719.
- EBERLEIN. — *Catalogue of the Brunswick Museum*. 1776.
- GERARD HOET. — *Recueil des Catalogues*.
- LEBRUN. — *Galerie des Peintres flamands, hollandais et allemands*. Paris. 1796.
- GAULT DE SAINT-GERMAIN. — *Guides des Amateurs*. Écoles allemandes, flamandes, hollandaises. Paris. 1818.
- R. VAN EYNDEN et A. VAN WILLINGEN. — *Geschiednis der Vaderlandsche Schilderkunst*. Haarlem. 1816.
- DESGUERROIS. — *Musée royal de La Haye*. Amsterdam. 1833.
- JOHN SMITH. — *Catalogue raisonné of the Works of the most eminent Dutch, Flemish and French painters*. London, Smith and Sons. 1839-1842.
- IMMERZEEL. — *Hollandsche en Vlaamsche Kunstenaars*. Amsterdam, Van Kesteren. 1843. Volume III.
- KRAMM. — *De Levens en Werken der Hollandsche en Vlaamsche Kunstschilders, Beeld Louwers, Graveurs en Bouwmeesters*. Amsterdam. 1858.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

- WAAGEN. — *Manuel de l'histoire de la Peinture*. Traduction Hymans. Bruxelles-Paris. 1864.
- BODE. — *Studien zur Geschichte der Holländischen Malerei*. Brunswick. 1863. (To be consulted on the subject of Bramer.)
- VIARDOT. — *Musées de l'Allemagne*. Paris. 1860.
- M. CHAUMELIN. — *Trésors de l'Art de la Provence*. Paris. 1862.
- LAGRANGE. — *La Collection Dufour à Marseille*. Gazette des Beaux-Arts. 1859.
- MANTZ. — *La Collection Dumont*. Gazette des Beaux-Arts. 1860.
- VILLOT. — *Catalogue du Musée du Louvre*. 1852.
- M. DUCAMP. — *En Hollande*. Paris. 1859.
- W. BÜRGER-THORÉ. — *Les Musées de Hollande*. Paris. Renouard. 1858.
- La Galerie d'Arenberg*. Brussels. 1859.
- Vermeer de Delft*. Gazette des Beaux-Arts. Paris. 1866.
- Catalogue de la Galerie Suermondt*. 1860.
- TH. GAUTIER. — *Moniteur*. June, 1858.
- FROMENTIN. — *Les Maîtres d'autrefois. Belgique-Holland*. Paris, 1877.
- H. HAVARD. — *L'Art et les Artistes hollandais*. Paris, Quantin. 1880.
- La Peinture hollandaise*. Paris, Quantin. 1880.
- Van der Meer*. Collection des artistes célèbres. Paris. 1883.
- F. D. O. OBREEN. — *Archief voor Nederlandsche Kunstgeschiedenis*. Rotterdam. 1882. Fourth part.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- MONTÉGUT. — *Les Pays-Bas*. Paris. 1884.
- KASTEREN. — *La Collection de Mme. Veuve Van der Hoop*. Amsterdam. 1861.
- WOLTMANN AND WOERMANN. *Geschichte der Malerei*. Leipsic. A. Seeman. 1888.
- DE STUERS. — *Notice historique et descriptive des tableaux exposés dans le Musée royal de La Haye*. The Hague, Nyhoff. 1874.
- DR. A. BREDIUS. — *Les Chefs-d'œuvre du Musée royal d'Amsterdam*. Translation of E. Michel. Munich, Hanfstaengl. Paris, Librairie de l'Art.
- Die Meisterwerke der Königlichen Gemälde Galerie in Haag*. Munich, Hanfstaengl.
- Amsterdam in de Zeventiende Eeuw*. By different writers. The Hague. 1897. (Chapter on Painting.) *Peintures du Musée de l'Etat à Amsterdam*. 1897.
- Catalogue du Musée de La Haye*. (See last edition of the *Catalogue résumé* in German. 1907.)
- Ein Pseudo Vermeer in der Berliner Galerie*. *Kunstchronik*. Leipsic. 16 Nov., 1882.
- The Vermeer of the De Grez Collection. *Kunstchronik*. Leipsic. May, 1906.
- Articles in *Oud Holland*. Amsterdam. 1883-1897.
- C. LEMKE. — *Populäre Aesthetic*. Leipsic. A. Seemann. 1870.
- H. L. BERCKENHOFF. — *Notre Art, in Pays-Bas*. Published by the Cercle des Journalistes Neerlandais. Amsterdam. 1898.

## JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

- LAFENESTRE and RICHTENBERGER. — *La Peinture en Europe. Le Louvre. La Hollande. La Belgique.* L. H. May, Paris. 1895-1901.
- G. GEFFROY. — *Les Musées d'Europe: Le Louvre. La National Gallery. La Hollande. La Belgique.* Librairie Nillson. Paris. 1902-1906.
- A. J. WAUTERS. — *Vermeer in the Museum at Brussels.* Burlington Magazine, December, 1905. *Art Moderne*, Brussels, Jan., 1906.
- Catalogue historique et descriptif des tableaux anciens du Musée de Bruxelles.* 3me Edition. Brussels. Van Oest and Co. 1907.
- MAURICE SAEY. — *Messenger de Bruxelles.* Feb., 1906. *Les Dessous à Bruxelles.* Brussels. 1908.
- W. MARTIN. — *La jeune fille à la Flute de Vermeer de Delft. L'Art Flamand et Hollandais.* Antwerp. July, 1906.
- Articles in Oud Holland, new series.
- TH. VON FRIMMEL. — *Blätter für Gemäldekunde.* April, 1906.
- CATALOGUES of the Museums of Berlin, of Dresden, of Brunswick, of Frankfort, of the National Gallery, of the Amsterdam Museum, of the Hague Museum, that of Buda-Pesth, of the Louvre, and of the Metropolitan Museum of New York.
- NOTES in the Burlington Magazine, Vols. VII and VIII; also in the Zeitschrift für Bildende Kunst, Leipsic.
- ARSÈNE ALEXANDRE. *Van der Meer. L'Art et les Artistes.* Paris. Oct., 1905.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- GUSTAVE VANZYPE. — *Vermeer de Delft*. G. Van Oest and Company. Brussels. 1908.
- DR. C. HOFSTEDE DE GROOT. — *Jan Vermeer van Delft en Carel Fabritius*. Amsterdam. Scheltema, and Holkema. 1907. With large plates reproducing all the pictures of the catalogue.
- A Catalogue raisonné of the works of the most eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century*: based on the work of John Smith. Translated by Edward G. Hawke. Macmillan and Co., London. 1907.
- WILHELM BODE. — *Rembrandt und seine Zeitgenossen*. Lepsic. 1907.
- JAN VETH. — *Im Schatten Alter Kunst*. Berlin. 1910.
- EDUARD PLIETZSCH. *Vermeer van Delft*. Leipsic. 1911.



•

## INDEX





## INDEX

- Altman, the late Benjamin, 260  
 Amsterdam, Sale of 1696, 237  
 Apprenticeship of Dutch Artists, 79  
 Apshoven, Ferdinand van, 79  
 Arenberg Gallery, 333  
 Aristocracy, preferences of, 39  
 Art, periods of, 20  
 Art-training, Dutch, 76  
 Asselyn, 47  
*Astronomer, The*  
     Du Bus de Gisignies Collection, 334  
     Rothschild Collection, 332  
     Städel'sches Institute, 327  
*At the Art Dealer's*, 351
- Back of House with a Courtyard*, 360  
 Backhuysen, Ludolph, 48  
 Bague, 134  
 Beit, the late Alfred, 275  
 Benson, Frank, 232  
 Berghem, 48  
 Berlin, Royal Print Collection, 316  
 Bertillon System, 30  
 Bibliography, 377  
 Bleyswyck, Dirck van, 61  
 Bloemart, Abraham, 47  
 Blue canvas, Vermeer's use of, 99  
 Bon, Arnold, 61, 74  
 Both, Jan, 47  
 Bourse, Elias, 95  
 Bramer,  
     Leonard, 75  
     Pieter, 75  
 Brunswick, Picture Gallery, 313  
 Brussels, Museum of, 337
- Buda-Pesth, Museum of, 339  
 Bürger-Thoré, 55, 57, 59, 66, 69, 94, 295  
 Bus de Gisignies, Vicomte du, 334
- Caravaggio, 153  
 Catalogue Raisonné of the known works of Vermeer of Delft, 246  
 Characteristics, Vermeer's, 30  
 Chardin, 210  
 Chiaroscuro, 205  
     Dutch study of, 170  
*Christ at the House of Mary and Martha*, 280  
 Cleansers, picture, 100  
 Coats Collection, 280  
 Collectors, Dutch, 42, 43, 44  
 Colour values, explanation of, 145  
*Concert, The*, 246, 356  
 Conversation pieces, 40  
*Country Fair*, 358  
*Courtesan, The*, 188, 319  
*Crucifixion, The*, 252  
 Cuyp, Albert, 48  
 Czernin Gallery, 341
- Da Vinci, Leonardo, 204  
     his impersonal vision, 27  
 De Camp, Joseph, 232  
 Degas, refined technique of, 18  
 De Groot, Hofstede, 156, 241  
     Opinion on *The Studio*, 346  
 De Hooch, Pieter, 8, 87, 197  
     composition and design, 165  
     picture in Wallace Collection, 167  
     treatment of sunlight, 157  
 Delaroche, H., 60

# INDEX

- Delft, 53-55  
     Van der Meer of, 56  
         ware, 174  
 De Man, 94  
 Dewing, Thomas, 228  
 De Witte, Emanuel, 95  
*Domestic Scene*, 356  
 Dou, Gerard, 47, 61  
 Dresden Gallery, 319, 324  
 Duc, Jan le, 91  
 Du Camp, Maxime, 66  
 Du Jardin, Karel, 48  
 Dürer, Albert, 78  
 Dutch religious painting, 46  
 Dutch types, 37  
  
 Eastlake, Sir Charles, 57  
 "Edges," 4  
 El Greco, 26, 73  
 Evelyn, John, 43  
  
 Fabritius, Karel, 54, 61, 72  
     death of, 74  
 Flinck, Govaert, 92  
*Flower Girl, The*, 351  
*Forge of Vulcan*, 5  
 Fragonard, delicate art of, 18  
 French influence, 22  
 Frick, H. C., 252, 256  
 Fromentin, Eugène, 48  
 Fused rendering, 26  
  
 Gainsborough, 38  
 Gardner, Mrs. John L., 246  
 Gautier, Théophile, 66  
*Gazette des Beaux Arts*, Bürger's arti-  
     cles in, 60  
 Gelder, Aart de, 90  
*Gentleman and a Young Lady*,  
     252  
*Gentleman and Lady Eating Oysters*,  
     357  
*Gentleman Making Music, and a Lady*,  
     242  
*Gentleman Washing his Hands*, 238, 242  
 Gesture, Vermeer's treatment of, 139  
 Giorgione, personality of, 3  
*Gipsy Woman, The*, 252  
*Girl and a Cavalier*, 357  
  
*Girl Asleep, A*, 260  
*Girl Drinking with a Gentleman*, 310  
*Girl Reading a Letter*, 281, 324  
*Girl with a Cat*, 355  
*Girl with Mandolin*, 267  
*Girl with the Wine Glass*, 313  
 Goya, 29  
 Grundmann, Otto, 230  
  
 Haarlem,  
     Van der Meer of, 56  
     Vermeer of, 65  
 Hals, Franz, 102  
 Havard, Henry, 70  
*Head of a Person in Antique Costume*,  
     358  
*Head of Young Girl, The* Hague,  
     123, 296  
 Heem, Jan Daniel de, 47  
 Herrera, 73  
 Holland,  
     culmination of its art, 21  
     in Vermeer's day, 35  
     riches of, 36  
 Hondekoeter, 43  
 Honthorst, 37  
 Houbraken, 63  
 House in Delft, 53, 289  
 Huntington, Mrs. H. C., 258  
 Huysum, Van, 43  
  
 Impersonality, Vermeer's, 202  
 Impressionism, 149  
*Interior with a Gentleman Washing his  
     Hands*, 355  
  
 Jan Steen, 89  
 Japanese,  
     composition, characteristics of, 171  
     possible influence of, 175  
 Johnson, John G., 267  
  
 Kaiser Friedrich Museum, 308, 310  
 Knoedler and Company, 264  
 Koedijk, Nicholas, 91  
 Koninck, Philip de, 90  
  
 Laar, Pieter Van, 47  
*Lace Maker, The*, 103, 330

# INDEX

- Lady and a Maid-Servant, A*, 317  
*Lady and Gentleman at a Spinet*, 277  
*Lady at the Spinet with a Gentleman*, 356  
*Lady Making Lace, A*, 352  
*Lady with a Maid-Servant and a Page*, 355  
*Lady with Lute*, 258  
*Lady Writing*, 250, 356  
 Laresses, Gerard de, 251  
*Landscape with Trees*, 360  
*Lesson, The*, 245  
 Louvre, Museum of the, 330  
*Love-Letter, A*, Beit Collection, 275  
     Rijks Museum, 286  
     Unknown, 356  
  
 Maes, Nicholas, 199  
     influence of French art on, 22  
*Maid-Servant Pouring out Milk*, 284  
*Man Playing Music with a Lady in an Interior*, 356  
*Man Reading, A*, 350  
 Manet, Edouard, 129  
 Mantz, Paul, 66  
 Marseus, Otto, 43  
*Mary and Martha*, 46  
 Materials, artist's, 82  
*Merry Company in a Room*, 357  
 Metropolitan Museum of Art, 248  
 Metzu, Gabriel, 8, 88, 196  
     changing of values, 120  
     his painting, *The Sick Child*, 168  
     lack of refinement, 17  
     skill 10  
     treatment of half lights, 119  
 Meyer, Claus, 217  
 Michael Angelo, 349  
 Mierevelt, Michael, 80  
 Modelling, Vermeer's, 121  
 Monconys, Balthazar de, 62  
 Monnet, Claude, painting by touches, 25  
 Moore, Albert, 130  
 Morgan, the late J. Pierpont, 250  
 Mostaert, 93  
 Murillo, his popularity, 27  
*Music Lesson, The*, 277  
 Mytens, Aert, 78  
  
 Naïveté of vision, Vermeer's, 23  
 National Gallery, the, 270, 273  
 Neer,  
     Eglon Van der, 48, 92  
*New Testament, The*, 304  
 Notan, 175  
  
 Obreen, M., 71  
 Old Masters, 193  
*Old Woman with a Reel*, 59, 354  
 Orpen, 227  
 Ostade, 47  
*Oude Gracht in Haarlem*, 359  
  
 Pacheco, 73  
 Paillet, A., 60  
 Painters, Dutch, 46-49  
*Painter's Studio, A*, 341  
 Pater, Walter, 37  
 Paxton, W. M., 231  
 Peace of Münster, 38  
*Pearl Necklace*, 308  
 Perignon, M., 60  
*Philip II.*, 5  
*Picture of a Street*, 360, 361  
 Pictures,  
     by Vermeer in Amsterdam Sale, 1696, 238  
     Dutch, 39  
 Poellenburg, Cornelis, 47  
*Pointillé touch*, Vermeer's, 103  
*Portrait of a Woman*, Buda-Pesth, 339  
*Portrait of a Young Girl*, Arenberg Collection, 333  
     The Hague, 296  
*Portrait of a Young Lady*, 358  
*Portrait of a Young Man*, 337, 359  
*Portrait of Vermeer*, 358  
 Potter, Paul, 37, 48  
*Premier coup*, Vermeer's use of, 126  
*Procession at Gateway of Leyden University*, 361  
*Procuress, The*, 7, 319  
*Pseudo Vermeers*, 363  
*Public Place at the Hague, A*, 362  
  
 Raphael, 3  
     popularity of, 27

# INDEX

- Refinement,  
in art, 18  
Vermeer's, 17
- Rembrandt, 3, 89, 200  
his manner of composing, 168  
lack of refinement, 17  
occasional manner of placing figure,  
31
- Renesse, C. A., 94
- Reynolds, Sir Joshua, 66
- Ribera, 152
- Rijks Museum, 281, 284, 286
- Roi Soleil, Le*, 41
- Rothenstein, William, 228
- Rothschild, late Baron A. de, 332
- Rubens, 3, 208  
treatment of half lights, 148
- Ruskin, John, 44
- St. Luke, Guild of, 62
- Sarto, Del, popularity of, 27
- Scene in a Courtyard*, 361
- Schalken, Godfrey, 48
- Schoonhoven, Vermeer of, 65
- Sebastian Van Storck, 37
- Sick Child, The*, 168
- Simon, James, 317
- Six Collection, 289
- Slingenlandt, Jan Pieter, 48
- Soldier and the Laughing Girl*,  
256
- Sphinx of Delft, 65
- Spot, painting by the, 26
- Square touch, Vermeer's, 101
- Städel'sches Institute, Frankfort, 327
- Steen, Jan, 89  
lack of refinement, 17
- Street in Delft*, 35, 289
- Studio Interior*, 5, 341
- Studios, Dutch, 81
- Study Head*, 316
- Study of a Head*, 359
- Sunlight, discussion on, 156
- Supper at Emmaus*, 45
- Swaneveld, Herman, 47
- Sweerts, Michiel, 78
- Tarbell, Edmund C., 229
- Technique, Vermeer's, 99
- Terburg, 194  
affected, quality of, 17  
his composition, 164  
his picture, *The Concert*, 168  
treatment of "edges," 111  
treatment of light, 119
- The Hague, Royal Picture Gallery  
of, 291, 296, 300, 304
- Titian, 207
- Toilet of Diana, The*, 208, 300
- Trooper and a Girl*, 358
- Two Pictures of Streets with Figures*,  
360
- Utrecht, Van der Meer of, 56
- Values, explanation of, 143
- Van der Helst, 37
- Van der Hulst, Pieter, 48
- Van der Laan, Dirck, 94
- Vandermeere, D., 66
- Van der Werf, 48
- Van de Velde, Adrian, 48
- Van Gogh, Vincent, 184
- Van Huysum, 37
- Van Veen, Otto, 47
- Velasquez, 3, 4, 208  
as a painter, 4  
his impersonal vision, 27
- Venetians, colour composition of, 186
- Vermeer of Delft, Jan, 3  
birth, 71  
certain defects, 6  
characteristic traits of, 30  
colour composition, 180  
coolness of tones, 74  
death, 72  
elected head man of Guild, 62  
election to Guild of St. Luke, 71  
his arrangement of light and dark,  
177  
his "blonde" note, 31  
his clarity, 113  
his composition, 162  
his design, 162  
his drawing, 134  
his finish, 222  
his light and shade, 151

# INDEX

## Vermeer — *continued*

- his manner of beginning, 126
- his manner of blocking in, 32
- his manner of placing figures, 31
- his manner of treating edges, 108
- his modelling, 120
- his modernness, 6
- his painting of maps, 155
- his position at easel, 123
- his preference for certain colours, 181
- his relation to Da Vinci, 204
- his relation to De Hooch, 197
- his relation to Maes, 199
- his relation to Metzu, 196
- his relation to modern painting, 215
- his relation to old masters, 193
- his relation to Rembrandt, 200
- his relation to Terburg, 194
- his relation to Titian, 207
- his relation to Velasquez, 208
- his surface, 115, 199
- his touch, 103
- his "values," 143
- his underpainting, 222
- impersonal vision of, 28, 202
- indifference to anecdote, 219
- influence of Fabritius on, 72
- influence on modern Dutch landscape painting, 217
- intuition for colour, 225
- lack of affectations, 29
- marriage, 71
- mentioned in van Bleyswyck's book on Delft, 61
- method of starting, 117
- naiveté of vision, 23
- pointillé* touch, 227
- possible influence of French art on, 22
- probable order of his pictures, 366
- sale of pictures, Amsterdam, 1696, 237
- selection, 20, 178
- severity of line, 131
- still-life, 7
- technique, 138
- treatment of drapery, 135

## Vermeer — *continued*

- truthfulness, 13
- types of women, 38
- use of blue, 187
- use of lemon yellow, 185
- Vertange, Daniel, 47
- Victoors, Jan, 93
- View of a Street*, 242
- View of a Street in Delft*, 360
- View of Delft*, 35, 53, 217, 291
- View of Some Houses*, 359
- Violent Storm at Sea, A*, 361
- Volmarijn, 80
- Waterloo, Anton, 48
- Watteau, 18, 38
- Weyermann, Campo, 64
- Whistler, J. McN., 173
  - his colour composition, 186
- Widener, P. A. B., 265
- William the Silent, 55
- Windsor Castle, 277
- Woman and Boy Sitting by the Fireside in a Room*, 352
- Woman and Child*, 353
- Woman at Work with a Child*, 353
- Woman Combing her Hair*, 355
- Woman Making Lace, A*, 352
- Woman Paring Turnips*, 354
- Woman Washing Boy's Head*, 355
- Woman Weighing Gold, A*, 265, 350
- Woman with Needlework in her Lap*, 353
- Wouwerman, Philip, 44
- Wynants, Johan, 47
- Young Girl at the Spinet*, 275
- Young Girl Conversing with a Doctor*, 350
- Young Girl with a Flute*, 264
- Young Lady at the Virginals*, 270
- Young Lady Seated at the Spinet*, 273
- Young Lady with Pearl Necklace*, 59, 308
- Young Woman Opening a Casement*, 248
- Young Woman Skinning an Eel*, 354















00458

